

THE HEIRESS AND HER GUARDIAN.

A TALE OF ENGLISH COUNTRY LIFE.

BY MRS. H. LOVETT CAMERON.

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CHAPTER XXII.

FACE TO FACE.

THE fine morning, as Colonel Fleming had said to himself had tempted him out from his hotel for a turn in the Park. Possibly there was some other reason as well that attracted him there; for, once among the gay crowd along the footpath by the side of the ride, he looked eagerly about him for one face which he longed to see again. Presently he took a chair, for he was not very strong or well in those days, and sat still to watch the crowd go by.

He saw her not. With a great relief, and yet with a strange pang of disappointment too, he caught sight of Lord George Mannersley's handsome face, and saw that the lady with him was not Juliet Travers. Then he looked for her among the riders; but, though many fair dames and maidens on their sleek well-kept horses passed him, the woman he sought was not among them. With a sigh he rose and turned his back upon the crowd. Some one, a little dried-up old gentleman who had been leaning forward over the railings, flew after him and intercepted his retreat.

"My dear Colonel Fleming!" cried the little man, shaking both his hands in eager greeting—"when did you come home? I am so delighted to meet you; it is indeed pleasant to see an old friend again. You don't remember me, eh?—I don't think you quite remember me?"

"Yes, indeed I do—it is General Chutney," said Hugh, and he responded to the little man's greetings very cordially.

"When did you come home? Leave, I suppose?"

"Sick leave, I am sorry to say. I have had a baddish bout of fever; but I hope a few months at home may set me to rights."

"Ah, that's bad. You know, after that fever at Futtleyghur—I dare say you remember how bad I was, and Mrs. Chutney quite broke herself up—"

"Yes, yes, I recollect it very well," said Hugh, quickly, in dread of one of the general's long-winded stories. "By the way, how is Mrs. Chutney?"

"Thank you, she is well, my dear sir—in health, I may say, quite well;" with rather a dubious emphasis, as if to say that there were some points in which Mrs. Chutney could not be said to be well. "Perhaps, colonel, you will look in upon her; she would be very pleased, you know; and if you would drop in and take pot-luck some day at dinner-time—just as you are, you know—we should both be very glad to see you and talk over old days."

"Thanks very much," said Hugh, as he prepared to make his escape from his garrulous and hospitable friend; "I will certainly do myself the honor of calling upon Mrs. Chutney some day soon." And then he went his way, smiling to himself as he remembered how he had been inveigled into that visit to the far recesses of westernmost Notting Hill on a previous occasion.

It seemed only yesterday that General Chutney had met him in the East India Club when he had come up from Sotherne, and coaxed him in almost the same words to call upon his wife.

But when Major-General Chutney had gone home, and imparted to the wife of his bosom the details of that same "pot-luck" invitation, greatly was the wrath and indignation of that portly matron. For what housewife, even the most talented, can abide that dreadful "dropping-in" system, which men think so very simple a proceeding!

"As if I could ask Colonel Fleming to sit down to hashed mutton or curried rabbit!" exclaimed Mrs. Chutney, indignantly, when her lord faintly remarked that he had meant it for the best, and that he was sure that Colonel Fleming would be quite satisfied with a mutton-chop. "Mutton-fiddlestick!" cried the lady, with a toss of her head; "who ever heard of such rubbish! No, of course, as you have been so foolish and improvident, I must keep myself prepared

I shall hope to call upon you some day soon, when I may possibly be fortunate enough to find you disengaged;" and with a slight bow, he left her.

Juliet, who had noted his upward glance, went into the house with a smile that was almost triumphant upon her face.

There is not a woman born, I believe, who can resist the temptation of making the man she loves jealous. It is a dangerous game, but women have this much, if no more, in common with "fools," that they "delight in playing with edged tools." The man may adore her, be devoted to her, spend his life in her service, and she may know it perfectly—but if she can make him jealous, she will do it. Her power over him seems to her to be incomplete unless she can cause him some amount of pain; that he should be angry and hurt and sore seems to her a stronger proof of his love than all his devotion and kindness; she acts her little part, and lays her little traps, and the man falls into them for the most part over and over again, with a blindness and an unsuspectingness that are absolutely astonishing.

As Juliet went up stairs, she said to herself, "So! he is jealous!—very well, I can easily work that a little more!—and surely, if he is jealous already, he must care a little for me still!"

"Whom on earth were you talking to, Mrs. Travers?"

"An old friend, Lord George," she answered, somewhat shortly, "who has just come home from India, and whom I was trying to persuade to come into lunch. Did you find it very hot out, Rosa?"

"Suffocating!—and such a crowd! But who is your 'old friend,' Juliet?"

"Colonel Fleming—he was my guardian," she answered, coldly, taking off her bonnet.

"A guardian!" cried Mrs. Dalmaine; "how alarming, and how dull! and I who detest the whole race of parents and guardians, grandfathers and grandmothers, uncles and aunts, unless they die and leave me their money; then I can bless their memories with tears in my eyes and wear decent mourning for them—decidedly I am very glad your old gentleman did not accept your invitation to lunch, Juliet! What a providential escape we have had!"

"I don't think you would have called this guardian an 'old gentleman' if you had peeped at him from behind the blinds as I

did," said Lord George, who was taking Juliet's gloves and parasol from her hand; "he seemed to me a very good-looking fellow—more of the cousin genus—eh, Mrs. Travers?"

"What rubbish you are both talking!" cried Juliet, impatiently—the idle chatter jarring strangely upon her. "Do let us come down to luncheon—I am starving; and do find something more amusing to talk about! Whom did you see this morning?"

They sat down to luncheon—and the usual gossip and scandal became the theme of the conversation. Presently Cis sauntered in silent and moody, and ate his luncheon almost without speaking—although Mrs. Dalmaine, who took a pleasure in tormenting the "young bear," as she called him behind his back, made a point of addressing a great many questions and observations very politely to him, which Cis, who always suspected her of laughing at him, answered with surly monosyllables.

"What do you know about this pianiste whom Juliet has engaged for the twenty-sixth?" she persisted in asking him—having discovered, by heaven knows what arts, that the subject was a singularly distasteful one to Cis.

"I have heard her play—she plays well; there is nothing else to know about her, I suppose," answered the master of the house, somewhat savagely, for it was not the first time that his unlucky recommendation of Gretchen had drawn upon him the somewhat close questionings of his wife's friend.

"Well, you know, Mr. Travers," continued the lady, "as I was saying to Juliet, we really never have done your musical taste justice. I always thought, you know—you mustn't be offended—that you were one of those matter-of-fact, soulless people, on whom music has no effect whatever—who could not tell the March in Faust from the Old Hundredth Psalm, for instance; and do you know, it is a delightful surprise to me to discover that you really can understand and appreciate musical talent—that there is *some* music that affects you. "Music hath charms," you know, 'to soothe the savage breast,'"—this last with a delicate intonation of fine-lady impertinence which Juliet, who was talking to Lord George, did not hear.

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"I don't know what you are talking about," said Cis, who knew he was being laughed at, and resented it, but had not wit

enough to answer his opponent in her own weapons; "I don't know anything about music, and I hate it!" digging savagely into the cheese as he spoke.

"In-deed!" exclaimed the fair Rosa, uplifting her eyebrows with well-affected astonishment. "Then really, Mr. Travers, may I ask—let me to ask *what* it is that makes you recommend Mdlle. Rudenbach so very highly?"

"How should I know? I haven't recommended her particularly. Juliet wanted a player, and I told her the name of one. Where is the occasion to make all these mysteries about it, Mrs. Dalmaine?"

"No mystery?" continued his tormentor, playfully. "O, then I *know* she is pretty! and you knew her before you married! O fie! fie! you naughty man!" reproachfully shaking her finger at him.

"Nothing of the sort," stammered Cis; and then got so red, that Mrs. Dalmaine at once perceived that she had gone unconsciously very near the truth; and the idea tickled her so much that she burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"What are you two making such a noise about?" said Juliet, looking up from her talk with Lord George at the other end of the table.

"O nothing, dearest Juliet!" cried Mrs. Dalmaine, still in convulsions of laughter; "only—my dear—your husband is quite—the most amusing man—I ever met in my life!"

At which piece of information Juliet looked profoundly astonished, and Cis proportionately irate.

After lunch, when Lord George had taken his departure, and Mrs. Dalmaine was established in her friend's barouche—for, having no carriage of her own, she generally managed to be taken out in Juliet's—the little woman observed to her friend, as they rolled luxuriously down Piccadilly:

"That quiet husband of yours is rather sweet upon the piano-player, my dear Juliet!"

No woman, however little she may care for her husband, likes to have that kind of thing said to her. Juliet felt very angry. "I think you presume upon your friendship with me, Rosa!" she cried, indignantly, flushing up.

"Don't fly out, Juliet. I always say what I think, and it is only meant as a hint to you. Bless you, my dear, we all have to

come to it! Why, my old man has been dancing attendance on Lady Featherbrain any time the last eight years, and it doesn't lie very heavy on my heart, does it?"

"I don't think you have any right to say such things about Cis," persisted Juliet, angrily—"especially to his wife."

"Very well, dear; I won't say it again," answered Mrs. Dalmaine, with perfect good humor. "Only, if it gives you any amusement to watch, you will probably find it out for yourself. Let us change the subject, as it is one you don't seem to like, and do tell me what to wear at your party; will my blue and chocolate do, or must I have a new dress?" And thus the first seeds were sown of a great deal of mischief, which afterwards grew up and flourished.

During the remainder of the week Juliet watched anxiously and feverishly for Colonel Fleming's promised call. She had mentioned his return, as in duty bound, to Cis, upon whom the fact had not seemed to make much impression, and who had merely observed that she had better ask him to dinner.

Juliet, who could hardly mention Hugh's name without a beating heart and a painful sensation of self-consciousness, could not understand how it was that Cis had never guessed her secret in the faintest degree, although he must have known from her words to him when they were first engaged that some one had already possessed her affections.

But Cis Travers had no great acuteness of perception, and his sensitiveness was too keenly awake to his own feelings and thoughts to be very much alive to those of another, even though that other might be his wife. He was vaguely and somewhat peevishly jealous of such men as Lord George Mannersley, who hung about and engrossed the attention of his beautiful wife; but when, with changing color and averted eyes, she spoke to him of Hugh Fleming, he failed to read the signs of real danger in her face, and only thought that the guardian's return was rather a bore to himself, as he remembered to have stood somewhat in awe of the man whose mind, and breeding, and knowledge of the world were so infinitely superior to his own.

"Come home, has he! O, well, you must ask him to dinner or something, I suppose," he had said, carelessly; and Juliet, who on this topic alone felt almost humble with her husband, knowing how much her heart

wronged him every hour that she lived, had been thankful to escape so easily, and to have said all that her conscience demanded of her upon the subject.

When Colonel Fleming did call in Grosvenor Street, he came at an unfortunate moment. The room was full of people—Lady Caroline Skinflint, who was a great chatter-box, was taking up all Juliet's attention with a vivid description of how one great lady had turned her back publicly upon another before everybody at Lady Somebody's ball, and how she, Lady Caroline, had seen the whole thing from beginning to end; and in the middle of the story Colonel Fleming was announced.

Lady Caroline put up her eyeglass for a moment at the new-comer with wellbred curiosity, and then seeing that it was a stranger, and that she did not know him, she dropped it again, and went on with her story with fresh animation.

There were two other ladies present, old Sotherne neighbors, whom Mrs. Dalmaine, leaning languidly back in her chair, had been endeavoring to entertain with vapid remarks on the weather and the academy, whilst with one ear she was listening with all her might to catch some fragments of Lady Caroline's spicy story. These two country ladies were none other than our old friends Mrs. Rollick and her daughter Eleanor. Miss Arabella had long ago been taken to bless a good man's store—a very humble store, derived from his captain's pay in a line regiment.

Good Mrs. Rollick, who began to find that, with Juliet entirely engrossed with her fashionable acquaintance, and Mrs. Dalmaine vouchsafing only a few inattentive remarks, her visit to Mrs. Travers was a very uncomfortable one, hailed Colonel Fleming's entrance with positive delight.

She shook hands with him with effusion, and although for the first moment Colonel Fleming hardly recollected her, she soon recalled herself to his memory.

"You don't remember me, Colonel Fleming—Mrs. Rollick, you know—and my daughter Eleanor—the only Miss Rollick now. My dear Arabella is Mrs. Wilson now, and has such a dear little baby boy. And how long have you been home, Colonel Fleming? How pleasant it is to meet an old friend so unexpectedly! Yes, we still live down in the old country, but Eleanor and I come up for a few weeks in June,

just to see the world and the picture galleries, for, as my daughter Mrs. Wilson says—" and here Mrs. Rollick went off into sundry quotations from the sayings and doings of "my daughter Mrs. Wilson," who, in virtue of her matrimonial dignities and the existence of the juvenile Wilson aforesaid, was evidently a great authority, and an unfailing cause of pride and glorification to her fond mother.

Meanwhile more visitors came in, and Lady Caroline took her leave; and Mrs. Dalmaine, having affectionately escorted her ladyship—to whose dinner-parties she coveted an *entree*—to the door, came back and took a chair near Mrs. Rollick, with a wonderfully quickened interest in that good lady's somewhat uninteresting chatter.

"I can't leave that nice-looking man to the tender mercies of that fussy old woman," she said to herself. "By the way, he doesn't look much like one's idea of a guardian. How sly of Juliet to talk of him as if he were an old man!" Whereupon that astute observer of human nature decided that she would keep her eyes open, and observe carefully the proceedings of this same slight soldierly-looking guardian, whom her own imagination, far more than anything Juliet had said, had pictured as something wholly different from what he was.

Mrs. Dalmaine thought she would try a little fascination upon him herself, but was surprised to find that Colonel Fleming seemed infinitely to prefer to her own sweetest smiles and glances, Mrs. Rollick's commonplace accounts of all the changes and chances that had altered the neighborhood of Sotherne, interspersed with anecdotes and remarks relative to "my daughter Mrs. Wilson."

Presently, seeing it to be hopeless to wait till all her visitors had gone, Colonel Fleming got up and took his leave of Juliet, who had not had one single word of conversation with him, and who could only manage hurriedly to engage him to dinner as she shook hands with him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MUSICAL PARTY.

"THE plot thickens!" said Mrs. Dalmaine to herself, as she peered out from under the shade of her coquettish little white parasol at sundry events which were passing in front of her nose.

"Hum! there goes number one in a rage!" as Lord George Mannersley, with a very ill-tempered face, strode quickly past her, stumbling over her dress as he does so. "He needn't tread on my toes, though! What a fool Juliet is to throw him over! he's a much more creditable man than the other—younger, and more the fashion. Number two is not bad, either. I wonder if he is an old love—and yet she does not seem to care about him, either; she is looking as cross as poison at him now. I can't make her out at all!"

Neither could Colonel Fleming make her out. He was standing by the side of her pony carriage, where she had drawn it up in the shade at the Row. She was leaning back, not looking at him, but playing with her whip.

A fortnight had gone by since Colonel Fleming and Juliet Travers had met each other in the street—a fortnight, during which, from standing a little aloof from her at first, he had gradually become more and more attracted to her presence, until now he saw her daily.

It was in order to protect her against the attentions of that good-for-nothing young lord that he haunted her side, he had said to himself at first. Poor child! she was so surrounded with frivolous and unprofitable friends, her position and her beauty so exposed her to the envious voices of slander, and her husband was so utterly unable to shield her, or to guard her fair name; it would be cowardly indeed if an old friend like himself, who, from his old relations with her, was indeed the first of those who were bound to take care of her, were to stand aloof from her, and to leave her to her fate.

All this, and much more in the same strain, he had at first argued to himself. But by degrees these flimsy excuses faded away even from his own mind, and he began to know that it was for his own sake more than for hers, for the hungering and thirsting for one of the old looks in her dark eyes, for the yearning and longing that he had to know if indeed he were wholly wiped out of her heart—for the craving for some of the old love which she had once brought and laid at his feet—for all this, and for nothing less, that he hovered more and more about her—that he could not keep away from her. For Juliet Travers was not to him what Juliet Blair had been. She

was cold and distant to him, often bitterly sarcastic. Sometimes, even, when some chance word seemed to soften her for a moment towards him, a something, some harsh thought, some angry recollection, seemed to sweep suddenly across her, and place an inseparable barrier at once between them.

He could in no manner get back to the easy familiarity, the pleasant confidence, the playful friendliness which had distinguished all their intercourse in the old days. There seemed always a wall as it were between them, whenever he made the slightest attempt to overstep the most ordinary commonplaces of conversation. There was something about her which puzzled him entirely. He could not make her out!

So he stood talking to her, and Juliet, not looking at him at all, listened—listened not so much to what he was saying as to the sound of his voice—listened with a secret happiness and joy which no one would have guessed at from her perfectly impassive and somewhat absent face.

"You are more altered in five years than I could have believed possible," he had ventured to say to her, as he watched her beautiful but listless face.

"Possibly—I have had a good deal to alter me—" she answered, dreamily.

"You would be very angry, I suppose, were I to tell you what, if I had not known you so well, I should now imagine to be your character?"

"Well, I will try not to be so very angry," said Juliet, with a half laugh; "essays on one's character are sometimes rather amusing. What—if you did not know me so well, as you say—what, then, would you think of me, Colonel Fleming?"

"I should think from your manner that you were a woman who had absolutely no heart."

"How delightful!" she answered, scoffingly. "A woman, or indeed a man, without a heart, is more to be envied than a millionaire. You are quite right, Colonel Fleming; I have no heart—I am too worldly; and I never yet heard of any one being the happier for the possession of that inconvenient organ. Pray, let us talk of something more lively. Are you coming to my musical crush to-night?"

"Certainly—but remember, Mrs. Travers, that I did not say you had no heart, only

that you have that sort of reckless manner that looks as if you wished to be thought heartless. I am such an old friend, that you must forgive my saying these things to you."

"O, say anything you like," she exclaimed, impatiently; "I have long ago ceased to care what people say of me. But you must excuse me for leaving you; it is too hot for moral dissection—I literally have not the strength for anything so exhausting—it is nearly two o'clock, and here comes Mrs. Dalmaine to be driven back to lunch. Good-by, Colonel Fleming. I shall hope to see you this evening!" And as Mrs. Dalmaine took her place in the carriage by her side, Juliet nodded pleasantly to him, touched her ponies, and drove off.

He turned away from her with a sigh. Utterly shallow, and worldly, and frivolous, what was there left of the woman whom he had loved? And yet—strange contradiction!—Hugh Fleming loved her better than ever!—he felt so sure that she was but acting a part, that she was not showing him her real self, that her heart had become a locked casket, of which he alone held the key.

Had he seen her happy in her husband and in her home, Hugh Fleming would have said to himself "Thank God!" and have resolutely turned his back upon her. But she was not happy—it needed no wonderful powers of divination to perceive that Juliet Travers was by no means a happy woman.

Her husband had no influence, no control over her, no power to claim her affection or her respect. And yet this was the husband whom Colonel Fleming had himself recommended to her, whom it had once seemed his duty and his honor to urge her to accept. Most fatal error!

He saw her unhappy, hardened, striving to smother her better feelings in a whirl of dissipation, and amongst the most frivolous and unworthy companions—he saw her thus in her daily life, in which her husband had sunk into a peevish nonentity, for whom she hardly kept up a pretence of affection—and for all this Hugh Fleming justly felt himself to be in a measure answerable!

And then, he loved her—loved her as he had never loved even that pale bride who had died on her wedding morning! The

sweet, pure first love, blamelessly perfect, innocently holy, who was still as a saint—and a religion to him, had yet less hold upon his heart than this woman, with all her strong passions and glaring faults, with her proud rebellious heart, and all her very human imperfections.

Strange contradiction! that we love most what is the least worthy of love—that the very faults in some people attract us more than the virtues in others!

That evening, Mrs. Travers's drawing-rooms were crammed and crowded with the best and most select of London society.

And not only were the drawing-rooms crowded, but out into the landing and down the staircase into the hall struggled the well-dressed throng—treading on each other's dresses and toes, thumping their elbows into each other's chests, crushing, crowding, fighting their way up inch by inch, with much the same doggedness, and very much the same manners minus the oaths, as the commoner crowd of their fellow-creatures, who, dragged and shabby, hustle together on the sloppy pavement on Lord Mayor's day, or crush in nightly at the pit-doors of the theatres.

"What a crush!" "We shall never get into the room!" "I wish people would not push so!" with a savage look behind her. "Really, madam, it is not my fault!" answers the very fat man who is glared at, and who is perspiring freely and mopping his bald head with his handkerchief. "Fancy calling this pleasure!" "Mamma, I feel sure I shall faint!" "Don't be a goose, Ellen; take hold of my arm—we are nearly up." Such are some of the exclamations to be heard from the strugglers on the staircase.

On the landing stands Juliet in her diamonds, shaking hands mechanically with every one who comes up, whilst intimate friends whisper as they pass her, "Dear Mrs. Travers, what a success your parties always are!—*everybody* here!" And then push on into the rooms to remark audibly to a friend, "Perfectly awful, my dear! People should not be allowed to crush up their friends in this way, with the thermometer at boiling point; and half my dress is torn off from my back, I assure you!"

A well-known tenor singer has just finished "Il Balen" amid a murmur of well-

regulated applause from those immediately around the piano, for the crowd is so dense that in the second room no one has been able to hear a note.

Some one whispers the name of the young pianiste, as Gretchen stands up for a moment beside the piano.

There is a certain affectation in the high gray dress in which she invariably appears in public, only that now-a-days the old merino has been replaced by the richest corded silk; there are Glorie de Dijon roses in her hair and in the white muslin fichu that is folded over her bosom, and she carries more roses in her hand—roses about which perhaps the master of the house knows more than any one else.

Gretchen looks rather nervous as she stands pulling off her gloves; she is not generally nervous, but the sight of Cecil Travers's wife in all her blaze of satins and diamonds, the consciousness that it is in her house that she is to play, had made her heart flutter ever since she came in. Just before she begins she looks down the room, and through the sea of faces catches sight of Cecil's; a half smile passes between them, and then Gretchen sits down, strikes her first chord, and forgets to be nervous.

There are not many performers on the pianoforte who have the art of silencing a mixed chattering audience after the fashion that Gretchen Rudenbach had.

When a player sits down to the piano, it is generally the signal for conversation to wax fast and furious; many a *soi-disant* lover of music, who would think it a sin to speak above a whisper during the feeblest warblings of the weakest of Claribel's weak ballads, will nevertheless consider himself quite entitled to discuss his politics or his horses in a somewhat louder tone than usual if the music that is being performed, however good it may be, is "only playing."

During the first dozen bars that Gretchen played, no one listened, and every one talked; and then one said "Hush!" and another said "Hush!" and the sound of talking became fainter and fainter, till at last one old gentleman was left declaiming alone about South American stocks and his own bad fortune therein, a communication which was meant to be of a confidential "aside" to his neighbor, but which,

owing to the sudden cessation of the buzz of voices around him, came out, to his own amazement, at the very highest pitch of his voice.

There was a suppressed titter, and then his wife, who was young and musical, made a rush at him, and he subsided, very thoroughly ashamed of himself, into a corner.

After that you could have heard a pin drop among all that breathless, silent audience.

Gretchen played without music—and almost without knowing what she was going to play—a strange weird mixture of Beethoven, and Schubert, and Bach, and a dozen other great composers, whose works were all familiar to her from her childhood, and which she blended one into the other with a completeness and harmony that of itself bespoke her real genius.

And the girl's face as she played was not the least part of the attraction of her performance.

Her wide-open blue eyes, with fixed gaze, seeing nothing of what was before them, but wrapt in visions conjured up by her own sweet music; her whole face absorbed, entranced, beautified, by a devotion to her art which amounted to a positive passion,—it was no wonder that every eye was turned admiringly towards her, and every ear enraptured by the pathetic soul-stirring harmonies which her slight fingers had power to draw from the keys of the instrument.

Standing in the further corner of the room, half-concealed by the draperies of the window-curtains, was a small middle-aged little lady in a very unpretentious mauve-silk dress, and with an eyeglass up to her eye.

There was nothing remarkable about this little lady in any way. She had a kindly, but neither clever nor striking countenance, pleasant brown eyes, and smooth dark hair, already flecked with gray, drawn back under a neat but somewhat dowdy lace cap, whilst the whole of her attire was thoroughly unfashionable and countrified.

When Gretchen Rudenbach's playing came to an end, amid a tempest of applause, this unobtrusive little lady put down her eyeglass, and, turning to her next neighbor, who happened to be our good friend Mrs. Rollick, said:

"It is singular how certain I feel of having seen that young lady before."

"Isn't her playing lovely?" cried Mrs. Rollick, enthusiastically. "I never was so delighted in my life! Just that little bit of Chopin was so lovely, wasn't it?—and my daughter Mrs. Wilson plays it quite as well, I assure you; doesn't she, Eleanor? It is wonderful what a touch Mdlle. Rudenbach has, and such expression and feeling; and then, as my daughter Mrs. Wilson says—"

"I wonder where I can have seen her?" says her companion again, interrupting the course of Mrs. Rollick's maternal admiration.

At this moment Juliet, moving slowly through her crowd of guests, came up to her country friends. "Have you been pleased, dear Mrs. Dawson?" she says, pressing the hand of her old friend kindly.

"Delighted, my dear. But it is so curious that I feel sure I have seen that girl before, and I cannot remember where."

"Probably you have heard her play at some concert; she goes about a good deal, I believe."

"No! I have never heard her play; it is her face I remember so well: those large blue eyes, and that sort of fixed look—it is perfectly familiar to me. I feel sure that it was at home, not in London at all!"

"At home at Sotherne!" repeated Juliet, in astonishment. "Can she be a Sotherne girl? Dear Mrs. Dawson, surely you are mistaken?"

And then all at once Mrs. Dawson remembered; remembered Juliet's wedding-morning, and the strange girl who had come by the early train and crouched down behind the pillar of the church, with her white scared face, and her big wide-opened eyes, and her look of misery as the bride and bridegroom passed out.

Remembering this, Mrs. Dawson remembered also her own commentaries on the event, and what she had thought this poor girl to be.

"O yes, I remember now," she said, and stammered and got rather red as she said it.

But Juliet wanted to know; her curiosity was excited.

"Well, where was it, Mrs. Dawson?" she persisted. "Surely not at Sotherne?"

Mrs. Dawson was an honest little woman; it flashed through her mind quickly that she had no right to point out the possibility of evil, and that to hesitate or to turn

away the question would be but to arouse Juliet's suspicions, and to make her think she was hiding something of importance from her; so she determined upon speaking the truth:

"Why, my dear, it was in the church at your wedding."

"At my wedding!" repeated Juliet, in amazement, whilst a quick blush reddened her face for an instant.

"Yes! it was in the church. Not of course she was not a Sotherne girl, only a stranger come in from curiosity; I noticed her when I went in first to arrange the flowers, and her face made an impression upon me, that is all. It is curious I should have recognized her again."

"Are you quite sure it is the same girl?" asked Juliet, earnestly, in a low voice.

"Yes, quite. It is rather odd, isn't it? Perhaps she was giving music lessons in the neighborhood. It is singular I should see her here again."

"Very singular," repeated Juliet, mechanically.

Just then Mrs. Dalmaine passed by, and whispered in her ear:

"Do look at that wicked young husband of yours, my dear, flirting with Mdlle. Rudenbach; didn't I tell you he was sweet upon her? and no wonder, I am sure, for she plays like an angel. I should say there is no wild beast nor husband she could not tame if she chose."

And Mrs. Dalmaine passed on with a laugh. Juliet turned with a start, and looking towards the piano saw, in fact, Cecil bending over Gretchen and talking to her in an animated way quite unusual to him. He was touching the flowers in her hand, and from his expression, and the smile on the girl's face, Juliet felt convinced that they were her husband's gift.

A light seemed to break in upon her all at once; the meaning of many things in Cecil's conduct became plain to her. With a sudden indignation it struck her that he must have known this woman before his marriage, and that the whole of his early affection for her was but a sham and a delusion; and, alas! a motive for such a sham was easily supplied by her own wealth. That even on her wedding-day, and during the utterance of his marriage vows, this girl should have been actually present, was a shock to her pride and self-respect which Juliet could not but feel acutely.

She turned round to Mrs. Dawson, and said, rather coldly:

"One sees such strange likenesses occasionally; but I feel sure you must be mistaken, Mrs. Dawson. Have you had an ice yet? Will you not go down and get one?" And then she moved on, and coming face to face with Hugh Fleming among the crowd, she could not even smile at him.

"They are all false to me," she said to herself, very bitterly. "The man I have married has never loved me at all, and the man I loved cared for me so little that he deserted me!"

And as she passed among her guests, smiling, flattered and envied, the beautiful Mrs. Travers felt that her life was scarcely worth having, and that she had not a single friend on earth.

Mrs. Travers's musical crush was a success; the tenor sang again, first a solo, and then a duet with a high soprano, whose voice, Mrs. Rollick was heard to declare, reminded her so much of "her daughter Mrs. Wilson's!" Then, of course, Gretchen played again twice, and each time she was more rapturously applauded. And then the guests began to go.

Some were off to other similar entertainments, others to balls, a few to their well-earned night's rest. In a very few minutes the battling, fighting crowd had all vanished and melted away, and only a few intimate friends remained.

Coming down stairs when almost every one had left the upper rooms, Juliet saw a few persons in the supper-room, and went in there to join them.

"Come and sit down, Juliet, and have some champagne and some chicken," cried Rosa Dalmaine, from among a little group by the door, dragging her friend down into a chair; and just then Cis came up behind her.

"Juliet, wout you come and say good-by to Mdlle. Rudenbach?—she is just going."

Juliet looked at him for a minute strangely; then a sudden impulse came into her mind.

"Certainly," she answered; "where is she?"

"In the hall, waiting for her carriage;" and they went out together.

Gretchen stood ready cloaked for her departure.

"I will see," said Juliet to herself, "whether Mrs. Dawson was right."

And then she went up to the pianiste with outstretched hand.

"I hope you have had some supper, Mdlle. Rudenbach. Are you sure you have had everything you want? will you not have another glass of wine before you go?—for I am sure you must be tired. No?—well, I must thank you much for your very beautiful music; everybody has been delighted with it. I 'am glad to have made your acquaintance, especially as I hear that you know my part of the world. Perhaps you come from my county—do you?"

"No. Mrs. Travers. I don't think I know it," answered Gretchen, wonderingly, and half turning to Cis for explanation.

"That is not likely, Juliet; what makes you think so?"

"O yes, Mdlle. Rudenbach, you have been at Sotherne, for there was a lady here this evening who said she remembered seeing you in Sotherne Church."

"In Sotherne Church!" repeated Cis, in genuine amazement.

But over Gretchen Rudenbach's usually pale and placid face there leapt suddenly a bright burning blush, flushing vividly from her brow to her neck.

"There is your carriage," said Juliet, with a little laugh; "I will not detain you; but I think I must be right about your having been at Sotherne. Good-night, and many thanks for your charming music!"

When Cis came back from handing the lady to her carriage he found his wife still in the hall. "What do you think of that for a telltale blush?" she said to him, with a short little laugh.

"I don't know what you mean," he answered, angrily. "What on earth do you suppose Mdlle. Rudenbach should be doing down at Sotherne?"

"Ah, that I should indeed be puzzled to say; perhaps you can enlighten me, Cis?"

But Cis, with an angry exclamation, brushed past her, and slammed his study-door in her face. And Juliet went back into the supper-room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PAIR OF LOVERS.

THE rays of the afternoon July sun were beating down fiercely upon the blaze of geraniums and calceolarias on the lawn at Sotherne, where the parrot was swinging

violently backwards and forwards, with screams of joy, in his cage, and where Andrews, the under-gardener, toiled and sweated painfully up and down after the mowing-machine. The striped sunblinds were all down in front of the drawing-room and library windows on that side of the house, so that not a ray of sunlight could creep into those two rooms; then came a hedge of laurel close up to the house, and beyond it another window, unprotected by blind or curtain, wide open, and not looking on to the lawn at all, but on to a straight gravel walk which led from the back regions into the gardens.

The prospect from this window was not a cheerful one—just that short bit of walk bounded on either side by thick laurel and holly bushes, and another evergreen in front—a dark dismal-looking yew tree, which completely shut out any further view.

On a hot day like this the little dark corner of the shrubbery was, perhaps, not unpleasant to look at; suggesting, as it did, coolness, shade and tranquillity; but one could not help thinking how dismal it must be on the many days of the year when it rained, or blew, or snowed from mornning till night. There was not much inducement, one would think, for the occupant of that ground-floor room to look out of the window. And yet at the present moment the window is, as I said, wide open, and a young woman, with both elbows on the window-sill, is leaning idly out of it, and looking down the very bounded limit of the gravel walk in front of it.

Time, since we have seen her last, has dealt gently with the fair Ernestine, for it is none other than our old acquaintance who so leans and looks from her workroom window. Her brunette skin is as clear, her black dickey-bird eyes are as bright and piercing, her figure is as trim and natty as when we last saw her, five years ago. But Ernestine looks considerably bored. There is a heap of finery on the table, and a dinner-dress belonging to her mistress, at which she ought to be working, lies on the floor behind her, where she has cast it impatiently from her with an evident intention of leaving it there for the present, while she pursues the course of her meditations.

"*Mon Dieu!* how dull it is here now!" exclaims Ernestine, aloud, to herself, with

a despairing sigh. "Never-one goes to Londres! never one sees any young persons! and the messieurs that come here, never they bring any valets! If it was not for the money I must get some day from madame, I would not stay here one day—not one day! it is *triste a faire mourir*. Why, it was better in the days of Madame Travers, Mademoiselle Juliette, and that *gentil* Colonel Fleming!—*ce pauvre Colonel Fleming! Que madame l'a donc joliment triche! Apres tout*, if Mademoiselle Juliette had married him, they would perhaps have come here often, and we might have had a little changement. Now, never I get an *affaire du cœur* except with that stupide Jams—*ah ca! qu'il est donc bete, ce Jams! mais enfin*," with a shrug of her shoulders—"mais enfin, *faute de mieux!*" and Ernestine sighed again, dolefully. "No amusements, no intrigues, no excitements, nothing now but *ce gros monsieur tres-laid*, who makes some faces at me every time he does meet me on the stairs, as if I was the *diable lui-meme!* and only the stupid Jams to talk to; but where can he be, that Jams! is he never coming to-day, I wonder!"

At this point of her reflections there was a step on the gravel walk, and James the footman—the old original James, from whom long ago she had wheedled the key of the letter-bag, and whose constancy to the object of his affections had remained unshaken ever since that time, appeared round the corner with a simpering and somewhat sheepish grin on his mutton-chop whiskered face.

"Ah, mam'zell, you are watching for me!" he exclaimed, delightedly.

"Ah, yes, cruel!" sighed Ernestine, sentimentally; "you are so late to-day. Where is Heegs?"

"Mr. 'Iggs is a-sunning 'imself in the kitching garden, and a-refreshing on himself with his missus's wall-fruit," replied James, facetiously, seating himself on the edge of the window-sill, and striving in vain to imprison one of his fair charmer's hands.

"*Laissez-moi tranquille!*" exclaimed Ernestine, slapping at him playfully. "I have some serious things to say to you, Monsieur Jams. What do you think of it all?"

"Of all what, my hangel?"

"Why, of *ce monsieur* who is here, of course?"

"O, old Lamps?" cried James, for so he

respectfully was in the habit, behind Mr. Higgs's back, of denominating the Rev. Daniel Lamplough, who was Mrs. Blair's present guest. "Old Lamps? O, what should I think of him, except that he's a mean beast? he was here a fortnight last year, and he only give me two-and-six when he went away, and I had cleaned all his boots, warnished the shabby old clumps up till they looked like a gentleman's almost, besides a-packing and a-unpacking of his portmanty—and a raggeder, wus-made lot of shirts I never did see in a gentleman's wardrobe in all my born days! What should I think of him, my dear, except that he's a stingy old bloke?"

"Ah, but I think much more than that, Monsieur Jams?" said Ernestine, shaking her head solemnly.

"What do you think, mam'zell?"

"Listen: I do not think that this monsieur—what do you call him?—Lamplough will wish to marry Madame Blair!"

"No-o-o!" faltered James, in amazement, while his mouth fell very wide open.

"Yes, I am sure—you will see," said Ernestine, nodding her head sagaciously and solemnly; "he does want to marry her, and madame will not say no; it is affreux that your pretres should marry themselves!"

"Them's your popish notions, my dear!" here put in her swain reprovingly.

"But nevertheless it is so," continued the lady, scornfully ignoring the interruption. "And madame will probablement marry herself to this fat monsieur; and then, my poor Jams, what will become of you? you will lose your place; the house here will be all broken up, the servants will all go, you will have to get another place."

"But you, mam'zell?" cried James, aghast at this dismal picture—"you?—what will become of you? Will you go and live with Mrs. Lamplough in London, and be diwided from me?"

"I!" cried Ernestine, indignantly: "I go and live in the house of a married cure, and be made to go to his miserable church, and to do what a fat ugly monsieur tells me! I!"

"Then you'll come along with me and marry me, my dear?" cried the ardent lover, rapturously.

"Marry you! and upon what, if you please, Monsieur Jams? can one marry upon *rien de tout* but love? No, Monsieur

Jams, when these things do force me to leave Madame Blair," continued Ernestine, rising from the window with a tragical air, "I do go and bury my sorrows in the bosom of mine own country—in my beautiful France! There is the carriage coming home, Monsieur Jams; go to your duties!"

And the unfortunate James, aghast at his lady-love's eloquence, and at her rejection of his tender advances, was perforce obliged to leave her suddenly by the same way that he came, lest Higgs, returning from his airing in the kitchen garden, should unwittingly run up against him and discover the way in which his subordinate was accustomed to waste his time when he imagined him to be polishing the spoons and forks.

The sleepy old horses jog-trotted up to the front door after their hour's drive, which, except under very strong pressure, was the utmost extent of time which the coachman—also an old servant, and as much a character in his way as was the great Higgs—would ever allow them to be out.

James, still slightly ruffled with his parting words with Ernestine, hastened to open the carriage door and let down the steps; and from it there alighted our old friend Mrs. Blair, followed by an elderly man who was none other than the reverend gentleman whose matrimonial intentions Ernestine had been so well able to fathom.

Last year, when Mr. Lamplough in his newly widowed woe had been brought down by a mutual friend to stay at Sotherne for a week or two for the benefit of his health and spirits, nothing could exceed the sweetness of the consolations which his hostess had all day long poured like balm into that bruised and stricken soul.

With gentle sighs she had often gazed at him fixedly, and then murmuring "dear friend!" had raised her handkerchief furtively to her eyes as though her feelings were too much for her. Frequently she told him that she too had suffered—that she too had sorrowed—that only a woman who had lost a beloved husband can truly sympathize with a man who has been bereft of a dearly beloved wife; that such sympathizing souls are sent into this world to console and to comfort each other; that now for the first time she had found that companion soul who was able to respond with perfect sympathy to the sorrows which she had borne alone for so many years.

And then the attentions, the *petits soins* with which Mrs. Blair encompassed her guest were unceasing and endless.

How she studied his fancies and his pleasures, how attentively she drew the curtain behind his chair lest he should feel the slightest draught, how assiduously she hunted out his favorite books and sent for his favorite papers and magazines, and, last but not least, how carefully she piled his plate with the choicest morsels and ordered the most *recherche* dishes to tempt his appetite, and almost went on her knees to persuade Higgs to bring forth the best old port after dinner!

In all this Mrs. Blair had an object in view; for she, like Ernestine, was getting tired of the dullness of Sotherne, where she could just afford to live, but which she could not afford to leave even for a month's trip to London in the season. And was not the Rev. Daniel Lamplough incumbent of the district church of St. Matthias, situated in the very heart of Belgravia?—where his eloquent and somewhat violent denunciations against his holiness the Pope, and the somewhat hazy female connected with that prelate whom he was in the habit of designating as the "Scarlet Lady," attracted rich and crowded congregations, whose pew rents brought in a very comfortable income to their worthy vicar.

Mrs. Blair did not think the position would be altogether a bad one; and then she calculated that she would probably be allowed to retain Sotherne as a country residence as well. Juliet had said no word of ever ejecting her from it; and she seemed to care so little now for the home of her childhood, of which she had once been so passionately fond, that it did not appear likely that she would wish to return to it herself.

To be the wife of a popular London preacher, residing during the greater part of the year in a well-appointed house in Lower Eccleston Street; to talk of Sotherne as "my country place," and to be able to spend the autumn months there; to play the country Lady Bountiful at Sotherne, and the woman of fashion up in town—was an existence which presented many charms to Mrs. Blair's vivid imagination.

The lover, on his side, had also been making his calculations. He had noted carefully the comfort and luxury of Mrs. Blair's surroundings at Sotherne. He knew, indeed, that the place did not belong to her

but to her stepdaughter, but he imagined that she rented it from her. He saw her surrounded by many servants male and female, with a carriage to drive about in, and hothouses and vineries to keep up; he appreciated her excellent cuisine, and tasted the first-rate wines which appeared upon her table. All these things, Mr. Lamplough knew, could not be had without money; widows generally have fat jointures—indeed, what is a widow without a jointure?—therefore it was not surprising that he should give Mrs. Blair credit for one.

The mutual friend who had introduced him to her had not known much about her private concerns; there was no one else to tell him; and certainly Mrs. Blair herself was not likely to divulge to him the fact that the establishment was entirely kept up by her stepdaughter; that carriage, horses, gardens and servants did not cost her one farthing; that the good old wine was allowed her by Juliet's liberality whenever Higgs could be induced to bring it forth; and that, in fact, her own living, and that of her guests, and Ernestine's wages, were the only things which came out of her own pocket. Mr. Lamplough knew none of these things, and Mrs. Blair knew that he did not, and she was not in the least likely to enlighten him.

Of course, during his first visit to Sotherne, in the character of a forlorn and heart-broken widower, it would have been in the highest degree indecorous had he alluded, however faintly, to the possibilities of consolation which life might still contain for him; but when, after an interval of eight months, during which time these "companion souls" corresponded freely and regularly, Mr. Lamplough again returned to Sotherne, he came with lavender instead of black gloves, with a hatband four inches wide in place of the eight-inch width of first woe; he came as a widower, indeed, but as a widower to whom happiness is again possible—he came, in short, to woo and conquer. Mrs. Blair seemed to him to combine every requisite for duly filling the position which he contemplated asking her to occupy. She was still a most elegant and pretty-looking woman, with pleasing manners and a knowledge of the world, and she was, he believed, devotedly attached to him.

There was only one point upon which Mr. Lamplough felt some uneasiness, and where his religious scruples threatened to

sternly bar the way to the impulses of his heart. It seemed to him that Mrs. Blair's religious views were most lamentably popish in their tendencies. She worshipped weekly, and professed to delight in Sotherne Church, where divine service was conducted in a way that Mr. Lamplough did not at all approve of. There were a cross and candlesticks on the altar, and a memorial window representing the Virgin and Child, in memory of Mr. Blair's first young wife; good Mr. Dawson preached in his surplice, and had daily morning prayers throughout the year—all which things were an abomination in Mr. Lamplough's eyes.

But a worse offence even than this was the presence of Mrs. Blair's French Roman Catholic maid. How Mrs. Blair could suffer an emissary of the Pope, a Jesuit perchance, to remain, in all her unconverted iniquity, under her very roof, was a fact which filled the righteous soul of the Reverend Daniel with pious horror whenever he thought upon it. He never passed Ernestine upon the stairs or in the passages without a secret shudder, and without privately ejaculating, "Get thee behind me, Satan!"—an expression which, however, he would not have dared to repeat aloud, as, had he done so, the vivacious-looking waiting-maid would have been quite capable of boxing his ears, or tearing out his hair, or otherwise inflicting some bodily injury upon him with her strong little brown hands.

Nevertheless, Mr. Lamplough felt sure that the lady of his affections sinned from ignorance only in this particular. Were the horrors of the popish faith once pointed out to her by an earnest Christian like himself, he felt sure that she would at once see and lament the error that she had unwittingly fallen into in harboring this daughter of Babylon for so many years in her household. Mr. Lamplough was well determined that no such blot should mar the fair Protestantism of his own establishment. On the very day that Mrs. Blair consented to resign her happiness into his keeping, he decided that Ernestine should take her departure.

It was after dinner—that genial hour when, having well fed and well drunk, man is at peace with himself and all mankind. The coffee had been served, the lamp brought in, the curtains drawn lightly over the still open windows; there was no

chance of any further interruption from Higgs until ten o'clock.

Mr. Daniel Lamplough leaned back in a luxurious satin-covered armchair, rested his hands one on each of his knees, and smiled benignly at his hostess. He was not a pleasant or romantic-looking lover certainly, and Mrs. Blair could not help thinking so as she glanced up at him from her work. Time was when she had dreamt of other kinds of men, of tall soldierly men with refined faces and polished manners—men, for instance, like Colonel Fleming had been. But those dreams were all over for her now—she was obliged to smother them away with a sigh; when a woman is past forty, she must take what comes in her way and be thankful.

And the man that had come in her way was not prepossessing in appearance. Mr. Lamplough was fat, and even greasy-looking in the face; his cheeks, of a dull red hue, hung down in flabby fleshy bags upon his neck, and were adorned with long straggling yellowish whiskers flecked with gray; his eyes were small and piglike; his nose was wide and rather red; and his hair was lank and long, and smelt of the free use of hair oil. Nor were his clothes put on with that neatness and care which invariably pleases the female eye: his coat was wrinkled, shiny and shabby; his boots were large, thick and clumsy; his shirt and voluminous white tie were never of the cleanest, and always gave indications of that "healthy action of the skin" which doctors say is such a desirable condition of the body, and which Mr. Lamplough apparently enjoyed in a very high degree.

The real fact was that the man was not a gentleman—he was essentially vulgar. And Mrs. Blair had lived quite enough among men who were thoroughbred to be perfectly conscious of this failing in her would-be lover. But, after all, a woman of her age cannot afford to be too fastidious!

Mrs. Blair herself was to the full as elegant and well-preserved a woman as ever.

Her fair hair was still done up in the same mysterious and innumerable bows and puffs over her high white forehead, her eyes were still fringed with the strikingly dark lashes, and the carmine upon her cheeks and lips was as vivid as it used to be; but then these are things in which art so far surpasses nature.

As she sat in a faultless evening toilet by

the shaded lamp, with some plain work in her white hands—it was a checked print frock for a little village child, a style of work she had lately adopted in deference to the serious profession of the man whom she was desirous of captivating—Mr. Lamplough gazed at her admiringly, and thought that she certainly was a very pleasant object to look upon, and that she would be a great ornament to his home in Lower Eccleston Street.

"How industrious you are this evening, dear Mrs. Blair!" he said, in that gentle cooing voice which he always adopted when addressing the fair sex.

Mrs. Blair smiled blandly. "I am anxious to get this little frock finished to-night; it is for little Susan Snuggs in the village. That is a very sad case, dear Mr. Lamplough; seven little children and an invalid mother—and the father gets such poor wages! If I can do some little trifle for the poor things, I am always so glad."

"Always tender-hearted, always occupied in good works, dear friend!" murmured Mr. Lamplough, tenderly. "Ah! where is the limit to lovely woman's influence when she gives her time to clothe the poor and to comfort the broken-hearted! A ministering angel thou!" added Mr. Lamplough, carried away by an effusion of feeling; though whether the ejaculation was addressed to Mrs. Blair in particular, or to the whole of the female sex in general, was not quite clear.

"Dear friend, you over-estimate my poor efforts; you are over-indulgent to me!" murmured the widow, bending over her work.

"Not at all, my dear lady, not at all. Do I not know your worth? have I not watched you daily in your home, where you so gracefully and in such a Christian spirit fulfil all the varied relations of mistress, of hostess and of friend? have I not learnt to appreciate all the sweet graces and the pure virtues of your character, dear—may I not almost say, dearest?—friend!" And here Mr. Lamplough rose, not without an effort, from his low chair, and, carried away by the enthusiasm of his feelings, dropped with a thud upon both his fat knees in front of his innamorata.

With ready presence of mind Mrs. Blair had, by a dexterous whisk, swept her delicate muslin flounces away just in time to save their being crumpled by the substan-

tial knees of her prostrate lover, and now, with a pretty flutter, she appeared to be overwhelmed with modest confusion.

"Dear Mr. Lamplough, pray rise—I entreat you; if any one should come in—" she stammered.

"No one will come in; Higgs has already brought the tea," said Mr. Lamplough, with practical bathos. "No, dearest Mrs. Blair, never will I rise—never will I move from this spot—until you deign to give a favorable answer to my prayer; until you promise to comfort my lonely heart, and to bless my lonely home!"

"Mr. Lamplough!" murmured the widow, hiding her face behind her lace handkerchief.

"Sweet sympathizing spirit, deign to listen to my suit; let us join our hearts, our hands, and I may say our fortunes—may I not call you my own, my Maria?"

"Mr. Lamplough!" again murmured the lady, in a fainter voice.

"Nay, why this formality? call me Daniel, your Daniel!" tenderly whispered the lover, who began to be tired of kneeling. For a man of his size and age it was a trying posture, and began to make his back ache, in spite of his previous vows of remaining there for an indefinite period. "Call me Daniel!" he exclaimed; and with a view to speedily bringing about the conclusion of this physically painful scene, he further proceeded to place his arms around the coy form of his beloved.

Mrs. Blair, after uttering a faint protesting cry, whispered "Daniel!" as she was told, and let her head sink gracefully down upon his shoulder. Mr. Lamplough afterwards discovered several smeary streaks of white and pink powder upon his coat where that fair cheek had lain—a discovery which filled him with great curiosity and unbounded amazement, for he had believed in Mrs. Blair's complexion as firmly as he did in her money.

That discovery, however, was only made at a subsequent period. Nothing occurred to mar those first few moments of bliss.

As soon, however, as the lovers had a little settled down, and Mr. Lamplough had regained the secure comfort of his easy-chair—which, however, he wheeled up considerably nearer to the lady of his affections than it had been before he had declared his intentions to her—he at once took occasion to establish the mastery which he intended

to assume over her by broaching the subject that lay upon his conscience—concerning the dismissal of the “Babylonian woman.”

“There is one little sacrifice, my love, which I must ask your affection to make for me,” he began.

“Vanity!” cried Mrs. Blair, who had already assumed the playful coquetry suitable to an affianced maiden. “Vanity! as if you did not know that there is nothing I would not do for you, Daniel!”

“Dearest!” murmured he, pressing her hand tenderly, “I know you love me too well to refuse the trifling sacrifice I must ask of you, especially when I point out to you how unsuited to the high Christian calling of a Protestant minister’s wife such an attendant is—my love, I must ask you to send away that popish French maid at once.”

“Send away Ernestine!” gasped Mrs. Blair.

“Even so, my chosen Maria; the association of a Christian Protestant lady with an idolatrous papist savors too much of offering of meats to idols—”

“What possible harm can poor Ernestine do?” cried Mrs. Blair, with more sharpness than is generally admissible in the sweet converse of affianced lovers. “I never heard her talk of religion at all, and I am sure she doesn’t care where she goes to church; I cannot get on at all without Ernestine, I am so used to her; and she has been with me so long, and understands my ways so well. No, really, Mr. Lamplough, I cannot send away Ernestine—I will do anything else that I may please you, but not that.”

“And yet, dear friend,” said Mr. Lamplough, in that gentle voice which was never raised in anger, and in which might yet be discerned a certain ring of determination which augured badly for Mrs. Blair’s chances of having her own way—“and yet that is unfortunately the one thing which my conscience is obliged to ask of you—the one thing, I may say, which you must give up to me as a proof of the sincerity of your affection.”

There was a moment’s silence, during which Mrs. Blair bit her lip in vexation. She saw plainly enough that Mr. Lamplough made the dismissal of Ernestine the *sine qua non* of the engagement between them—that she must either give up the offending waiting-maid, or else her newborn

hopes of a second marriage and an establishment in Belgravia.

It would be dreadful work, doing without Ernestine, who knew her so well—who understood so many cunning arts in hair-dressing and in face-decorating; how she should get on at first without her, she could not think; but then, it would be still more dreadful to give up those dreams of London seasons and London gayeties which she seemed to have but just secured within her grasp. No, Mrs. Blair felt, anything but that; it was very possible that she might find another maid, English and Protestant, who would be as clever in the mysteries of her profession as was Ernestine, but it was hardly possible that she would have another chance of a second marriage, and that with a man who possessed a house in Lower Eccleston Street.

With one great gulping sigh in homage to Ernestine’s varied talents, Mrs. Blair gave in.

“Of course, Daniel, if you make such a point of it, I must do what you wish—but the girl is very clever, and will be a great loss to me; still, if you really insist upon it, of course I am only too happy to please you.”

“There’s my own sweet Maria!” cried Mr. Lamplough, lapsing again into the fond lover, and pressing his betrothed’s hand tenderly to his lips. “And you will send her away to-morrow, my love?”

“To-morrow!” cried poor Mrs. Blair, in dismay.

“Yes, my love; I can no longer allow a child of Belial to rest under the same roof as my promised bride.”

“But surely not to-morrow. What excuse can I give for turning her out of the house like that after she has been with me so long? and what shall I do for a maid? Pray allow me at least to give her a month’s warning; consider the inconvenience—the injustice—”

“Say no more, my love—the girl is very frivolous, and her manner to myself is full of disrespect. There is a very nice modest-looking housemaid, who can surely wait upon you for a week or two until you can find another maid. You will, I know, do as I wish, my love; give her a month’s wages to-morrow morning, and let her go; the sight of that popish woman is abhorrent to me!” And, as if to close the discussion, Mr. Lamplough, after once again

pressing Mrs. Blair's hand most tenderly within his own, took up the *Record*, out of which he proceeded to read aloud such choice extracts as he thought might interest the future wife of the incumbent of St. Matthias's Church.

And Mrs. Blair smothered her discomfiture as well as she could, endeavoring to console herself with dreams of the select entertainments she would give when once she was established as mistress of that house in Lower Eccleston Street.

CHAPTER XXV.

ERNESTINE'S REVENGE.

"But, madame!"

"It is of no use your saying any more, Ernestine. I tell you I have quite made up my mind; here is your month's wages, and you can have the cart to take your box to the station so as to meet the four o'clock train."

"But, madame, to send me away like this after so many years! it is unjust, it is infame!" stammered poor Ernestine, almost in tears. It was in Mrs. Blair's little morning-room, after breakfast, that this conversation took place. "Have you no fault to find with me, madame, and yet to send me away like this?"

"Yes, Ernestine; it is because Mr. Lamplough says you are impertinent to him—"

"Aha! so it is *ce gros monsieur* who does this for me?"

"That is not the way to speak," answered her mistress, angrily. "I wish that Mr. Lamplough shall be spoken of with the greatest respect in this house—and, my good girl, I will give you a first-rate character; you will easily get another place."

"It is not that, madame," answered Ernestine, indignantly; "*certainement*, that I shall get another place I am not at all afraid; but it is the cruelty of madame to send me away like this after that I have served her for seven years, and done so many things for her which no one else could do; it is madame who will suffer, not myself."

"Very true, Ernestine," almost whimpered Mrs. Blair; "I don't know how I shall manage without you. But I can't help myself. Do go, like a good girl, without a fuss."

"Is madame then determined to sacrifice

me, an old servant, an old friend like me, to Monsieur—Monsieur Lamplough?"

"I must send you away, Ernestine—don't look so savagely at me—" For Ernestine, whose southern blood was well up, stood looking almost menacingly at her mistress. "Here, go up stairs and get that black silk dress with the bugle trimmings I had last winter. I will give it you, Ernestine; and for goodness' sake let us part friends," added Mrs. Blair, almost imploringly.

"Bah!" exclaimed the girl, with a little snorting laugh of contempt, "what do I want with your old black silk dress that is all frayed at the flounces, and worn to holes at the sleeves! Keep your dress, madame—*je m'en fiche bien!* and I go, madame, as you order me; but remember," she added, turning round at the door and looking back at her, warningly, "remember that you will be very sorry for this; you will perhaps wish, some day, you had not turned Ernestine out of doors like a *chien!*"

"Most impertinent!" exclaimed Mrs. Blair, rising from her chair, trembling with passion; but Ernestine had already left the room.

With a beating heart the girl ran along the passage. She had talked lightly but the day before, it is true, of leaving Mrs. Blair's service, but it was a very different thing to be thus turned away at a moment's notice from the house which had been to her a very comfortable home for so many years. And then Ernestine had always thought that Mrs. Blair would do something substantial for her when she left—give her a sum of money sufficient to enable her to start a shop, or to buy the goodwill of some dressmaker's business. Nor had her expectations been altogether unreasonable.

During the course of her seven years' service, Ernestine had done many things for her mistress which did not come strictly within the duties of a lady's-maid. There was that little incident of the letter, for instance; and there had been many little watchings and spyings, and faithful reportings of overheard conversations; in all of which transactions Ernestine had stanchly adopted Mrs. Blair's interests as her own, and had carried through the little intrigues demanded of her with the utmost discretion and with a secrecy which, considering her sex and her class, was perfectly miraculous. Mrs. Blair had frequently hinted to her

that some reward for these many faithful and valuable services would one day be in store for her.

"When you want to marry or settle down in life, Ernestine, you will find that I shall be your friend," she had said more than once to her; thereby raising many hopes in her attendant's bosom—hopes which had now been so cruelly and ruthlessly blighted.

Running along the passage, she all but tumbled into the devoted James's outstretched arms.

"Whither away?" said that gentleman, poetically—quoting from the last number of the penny journal which he had just been studying.

"Ah, do not stop me, Monsieur Jams! I must go and pack my boxes."

"Pack! why, who's a-going away?"

"It is I myself!" cried Ernestine, pointing tragically to her chest. "I go—I am sent away this very day—I know not where I shall repose myself this night! Alas, my poor Jams! you may well look *au desespoir*, for here you see a terrible instance of the ungratefulness of those we serve. Madame has sent me away."

"Sent you away, mam'zelle?" stammered James. "What for?"

"Ah, you may well ask," said she, shrugging her shoulders; "*car, moi, je n'en sais rien*. I know not—it is what I have told you, it is *ce scelerat* Lamplou."

"Old Lamps! what has he got to do with it?"

"He does hate me—he is going to marry madame, and he is determined to ruin me."

"I'm blessed if I'll brush his clothes or black his old boots any more!"

"But I blame not him," said Ernestine, spreading out her hands with fine Christian magnanimity; "I blame not him—it is only an animal! but it is madame who does turn me out, it is she who has made me the blood to boil. *Mais je m'en vengerai!*" added Ernestine between her teeth, and clenching her little brown fists savagely. "Don't you stand staring like that; go and order the cart to take me to the station, and let me go up stairs,"—and with that she brushed quickly past her dismayed admirer.

Half-an-hour later Ernestine was in her little attic room in the midst of her disordered wardrobe, with all her worldly goods around her on the floor. She sits on the ground in front of her trunk, turning the

key in a little common cedar-wood money-box, the contents of which we have looked at before.

Inside she first deposits her month's wages, just given her by Mrs. Blair, and then carefully counts over her savings. Twenty-three pounds seven shillings and twopence—not much, thinks Ernestine, ruefully, on which to begin life afresh. If that were all! but then, fortunately, that is not all. Ernestine's money-box holds another valuable object, which she thinks is as good to her as a check on the Bank of England.

Turning rapidly over the yellow bundle of French love-letters, the faded bunch of shrivelled violets—the gift of the dead soldier lover—which even at this moment she remembers to raise hurriedly to her lips, and the case of jewelry which she reflects can be pawned or sold if the worst comes to the worst, she comes upon a small flat parcel in silver paper at the bottom of the box.

"Aha!" says Ernestine aloud, with a triumphant smile, "*te volla, mon ami!* you have waited long enough, but now at last you are to be of some use to me. This is what comes of a little prudence and forethought; another, less wise, might have spoken of it before! What a good thing I did keep him all this time!" And with a chuckle of delight Ernestine slipped the paper into her leather purse, which again she placed securely in an inside pocket of her black hand-bag; then locking up the money-box again, she packed it up in her trunk.

A few hours later the French lady's-maid had turned her back forever upon Sotherne Court and the old life that had become so monotonous, and yet, by force of habit, so familiar and so homelike to her.

Juliet Travers was sitting alone in her little morning-room. The writing-table was covered with the morning's unanswered letters, bills, notes, invitations, of all kinds and sizes; her pen was in her hand, but she was not writing. There was on her face that bitter, hopeless expression which had become so familiar to it of late, and which had replaced the old eager impulsive look which had once made it so singularly attractive. The very droop of her head, the languid fall of her nerveless hands, the set scorn in her full red lips, all told the same story of the eternal battle going on within—the battle of pride against a hopeless

love. In front of her lay a monogrammed note highly scented with patchouli. It could not be called a love-letter, and yet there was a spirit of adoration and devotion in every line. Juliet took it up and read it over:

"I see nothing of you now; you are so surrounded by new friends, that you don't seem to care for your old ones. What have I done to offend you that you are so cold and distant to me of late? Twice when I have called you have *denied yourself*; dear Mrs. Travers, there must be some cause for this change in you.

"I want to get up a water party to Maidenhead for you. Choose your own day and your own party—any one you like. We will row up to Cookham and back in the cool of the evening to a late dinner at Skindle's.

"I have enlisted Mrs. Dalmaine in your cause, for you refuse to do anything that I ask of you now, and perhaps she will persuade you. Don't be so cruel as to refuse me this. Yours devotedly,

"GEORGE MANNERSLEY."

"I suppose I must answer it," said Juliet aloud, as the note dropped wearily from her fingers; "what a bore this sort of thing is! I used to find these parties and flirtations rather amusing a little time ago. I used to fancy they distracted my mind and took off my thoughts; but now I think they only make me worse. No: I really cannot go—Lord George is so wearisome; and since he has taken to this lover-like frame of mind, and reproaches me for neglect—for neglect of him! what a joke!—he is really quite insufferable. Here is some one to interrupt me. Come in!—who is there? Ah, it is you, Rosa; good morning!" and Mrs. Dalmaine, in a deliciously fresh toilet of palest pink muslin, entered.

"My dear Juliet, have you heard from Lord George this morning? because I have."

"Yes, I was just going to answer his note. Here it is." And Juliet calmly handed the note to her friend, who read it through with great interest.

"How *devoted* the poor man is!" she exclaimed; "and you really have behaved very cruelly to him, poor fellow! Well, what day are you going to fix? and whom are you going to have for the party? It must not be till next week, I think—at least, I have not a free day before, and I

suppose you are going to allow me to come!"

"My dear Rosa, how you jump at conclusions!" said Juliet, laughing. "I am just going to refuse it altogether."

"To refuse!" exclaimed Mrs. Dalmaine, aghast, sinking down into a low chair, and throwing up her little pink-gloved hands in dismay. "Impossible, Juliet! what can you be thinking of? Why, I made so certain of your going, that I stopped at Madame Dentelle's on my way, and ordered a boating suit on purpose!"

"I am very sorry, Rosa; but you can easily stop on your way back, and counter-order it."

"But, Juliet, you must be mad. It would be the very jolliest thing of the whole summer! I had settled it all; we would have just two boatfuls—six bachelors and six married women—no girls, they are always a nuisance. It would be the greatest fun; we wouldn't have anybody slow—all our own set, you know. You would enjoy it so much. You never will be so stupid as to refuse!"

"I am very sorry to disappoint you, Rosa," said Juliet, a little coldly, "but I have not the least intention of going. Such parties always get women talked about; one gets called fast, and perhaps worse."

"Yes, by slow, spiteful women, who never get a chance of any fun themselves!" said Rosa, with a toss of her head.

"No, not only by women: I don't believe that men—nice men—think any the better of one for doing those sort of things."

"But last year you did just as fast things. Don't you remember that day at Richmond—only you, and I, and Lady Withers, and all those men?"

"Yes, and I was very sorry for it afterwards; but I think very differently now about things; and besides, in any case your party would not do for me, because I have asked my young sister-in-law, Flora Travers, to stay with me; and I could not take her to that sort of thing, could I?"

"O, if you are going to take up with bread-and-butter girls in their teens!" pouted Mrs. Dalmaine.

"Don't be jealous, Rosa," said Juliet, playfully; "you know I am not given to 'taking up,' as you call it, with anybody."

"No, only with that horrid Colonel Fleming. I believe he is at the bottom of this proper fit that has come over you; he

always seems to think everything wrong, and looks daggers at me, as if he thought I was a shocking bad friend for you, and was corrupting your morals."

"Very likely he is right," said Juliet, dryly; and, dipping her pen in the ink, she began to write; "but I had rather not hear you abuse him. He is an old friend of mine."

"Yes, so I have heard you say before." And there was a little silence between the friends, during which Juliet wrote away steadily, refusing Lord George Mannersley's invitation; and Mrs. Dalmaine bit the end of her parasol, and looked as cross and ugly as a pretty little woman can look when she is in a bad temper.

"I am sorry for your disappointment, Rosa," said Juliet, presently, as she leant back in her chair and fastened up her note. "You must not think me unkind, and I will do anything you like to make up for it. Would you like me to give a dinner at Hurlingham?"

"Well, yes, that would be rather nice," said Rosa, softening a little, and reflecting that nothing pleasant or profitable could accrue from prolonged sulks. "Of course it depends upon who your party is."

"Well, I would have any one you wish for, only I will get Cis and one or two husbands, if you don't object much," said Juliet, laughing. "I won't ask yours!"

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Mrs. Dalmaine, fervently.

"And of course I must have little Flora Travers."

"And will you ask Lord George?" asked Rosa, a little timidly.

Juliet laughed. She had knowledge enough of the world to know how readily a "bosom friend" will pounce on an admirer out of favor.

"O yes, by all means, if you care about him—you are quite welcome to him," she added, a little scornfully.

Mrs. Dalmaine flung herself on her knees at her friend's side and kissed her rapturously.

"You darling! you really are a brick, Juliet; and don't you really mind my flirting a little wee bit with him?"

"Not the least in the world!"

"One thing more, Juliet—you won't go and ask that solemn old colonel of yours, will you? he would quite spoil all our fun."

"I have not the least intention of invit-

ing Colonel Fleming," said Juliet, rather coldly, pushing back her friend's rapturous embraces. "I don't think he would enjoy himself in the very least in our set!" she added with a bitter scorn that was quite unintelligible to her hearer.

A knock at the door, and the footman entering announced that "a young person" wished to speak to Mrs. Travers.

"The dressmaker, I suppose," said Juliet, rising. "Post these letters, William, and tell her to come up stairs: I will see her here."

"I am sorry to turn you out, Rosa, but I have a good deal to do this morning, and I must get this dressmaker's business over as quickly as I can; I will call for you to drive at five o'clock. William, open the door for Mrs. Dalmaine, and then ask the young woman to come up."

And Mrs. Dalmaine went.

"One minute, Miss Richards," said Juliet, not looking up from her writings, as the door opened, and the rustle of a woman's dress announced the entrance of the "young person." "Wait one minute, please, and I will attend to you."

"Madame?" said a hesitating voice behind her with a pure Parisian ring which certainly did not belong to honest little Miss Richards.

Mrs. Travers turned round with a start.

"Ernestine!" she exclaimed in amazement, "what has brought you to town? has Mrs. Blair come up, or—you look very strange—is your mistress ill?" she added, hurriedly.

"No, madame; Madame Blair is quite well, or was yesterday morning when I last saw her."

"Then, what have you to say to me, Ernestine? You look very uncomfortable standing there by the door—won't you sit down?"

Ernestine did indeed look strangely nervous and uncomfortable. She accepted Mrs. Travers's offer, and sat herself down on the edge of the high-backed chair nearest to the door.

"Madame," she began, hesitatingly, "I have come to you in great trouble. Madame Blair has yesterday sent me out of her house without a moment's warning; only just time to pack my clothes and be off."

"Indeed, Ernestine, I am very sorry to hear it," said Juliet, gravely; "you must, I fear, have committed some serious fault.

"Tell me, my poor girl, what it is, that I may see if I can help you."

And then Ernestine began to cry.

"Indeed, madame, I have done nothing," she gasped out between her sobs, "*absolument rien!* Madame would not even tell me why she sent me away; she has said she would give me a good character, but she would not let me stay one day longer, and she would not tell me why I was to go: some evil persons have poisoned her mind against me, I think."

"This sounds very strange, Ernestine!" said Juliet; but, from her knowledge of Mrs. Blair's character, it did not appear to her so very unlikely that some sudden caprice might have set her stepmother against her former favorite.

"She has given me but my month's wages, and not one sou more, after all these years that I have so faithfully served her!" sobbed Ernestine.

"My poor girl, I am very sorry for you," said Juliet, compassionately. She had never much liked Ernestine, but she had liked Mrs. Blair still less, and she could readily believe in her injustice and harshness to an old servant. "Don't cry, Ernestine; I will do all I can to help you to get another place."

"How good you are, madame! but, alas! I must not stay here, for troubles never come alone, and the very day I left—yesterday, it was—I heard from *ma pauvre mere*—*ma pauvre mere!*" she added, sobbing bitterly. Ernestine's mother had been dead ten years. "She is very old, *cette chère mere*, and she writes to me to say that she can no longer do her work, and the *officiers de police* have come and seized all her furniture—and she has not even a bed—think of that, Madame Travers, not a bed! and she past seventy!"

"Dear, dear! Ernestine; this is very sad," said Juliet, much distressed. "What can I do?"

"I must go to Paris at once, madame, and I have only just enough for my journey, not one sou to relieve my aged parent when I get there!"

"My poor girl, of course I will lend you—give you, I mean—anything you want!" cried Juliet, rising and reaching out her hand to take her purse off the writing-table, for she seldom stopped to inquire into a case of need. Juliet was generous and open-handed to a fault.

"Stay, madame!" cried Ernestine, rising with the air of a tragedy queen, and stretching out her hand to ward back the proffered charity. "Never shall it be said that Ernestine Guillot came to any member of the family she had served so long—to beg! No, madame, I will have no gift from you; I ask but for a fair price, madame; I have something to sell!"

"To sell? Well, if you are too proud to borrow, Ernestine," said Mrs. Travers with a smile, "I will do what I can to buy from you. Is it some trinket that you have?"

"No, madame, it is no bijou;" and, after much mysterious fumbling among the folds of her dress, Ernestine proceeded to draw forth from her pocket a small flat parcel in silver paper.

Mrs. Travers stretched out her hand for it, but Ernestine did not give it to her. "*Non pas, madame!*" she said; "I first must know what you will give for him?"

"How can I say unless I know what it is? Name your own price; what do you think it worth?"

"Would madame give me fifty pounds?" inquired Ernestine, not without hesitation.

"Fifty pounds! Why, what can it be worth so much?" said Juliet, considerably taken aback.

"It is a letter, madame!"

"Fifty pounds for a letter!" cried Juliet, in amazement. "My good girl, you must be mad! Who would give fifty pounds for a letter?"

"I think that you will, madame," answered Ernestine, calmly. Something in her voice and manner struck Juliet as singularly strange. Her face was bent, looking down at the packet in her hands, which she slowly and with a good deal of ostentation unwrapped from the two or three papers in which it was folded.

"This letter, madame—or rather, this part of a letter, for it is but the half that is left—was written more than five years ago—for the date is still here—to you."

"To me?"

"Yes, madame, to you. Madame Blair did steal it and tear it up; and yesterday as I was turning out all my old boxes to pack up my things, I did find this half left in the lining of an old dress she did give me three years ago, and which was so worn and *en chiffons* that I had never even picked it to pieces—it was not worth anything but rags—and there I did find your letter, madame."

"Let me see the handwriting," said Juliet in a faint voice, making a step towards her—whilst the room seemed to swim in front of her eyes.

Ernestine held up the fragment of the letter firmly in both her hands.

"Fifty pounds, madame, and it is yours!"

One glance, and Mrs. Travers turned rapidly away to her writing-table, unlocked the drawer, pulled out her check-book, and hurriedly filled in the fifty pounds to Ernestine Guillot or Order.

"Here is the money," she said, sternly. "I do not believe your story about your mother—but take this check, give me my letter, and go back to your own country, and never let me see your face again."

Bowing her head with a murmured remonstrance, Ernestine passed out of the room, as she passed out of this story, and Juliet saw her no more. And Juliet Tra-

vers stood motionless in the middle of the room, grasping the torn yellow fragment of her past life in her hand.

Before her dazed eyes, upon the faded page, the words of love and devotion, seen now for the first time, trembled all blotted and blurred through her tears; dear words of tender entreaty, of passionate love, of undying devotion; words that she had waited and pined for so long in vain, with such mad hopeless longing, and that had lain so long unanswered and unheeded.

With a bitter cry Juliet flung up her arms.

"Too late! My God, it comes too late!" she cried, and then fell forward across the table, with the letter clasped against her heart in a passion of despairing tears.

The footman once more opened the door and announced:

"Colonel Fleming."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

WHITE HOG ISLAND.

BY W. H. MACY.

IN the tropical latitudes of the Pacific, about midway between Rotumah and the equator, lies an island of coral formation, and of no great extent in size, which is laid down on most of the charts as "Achilles Island," but is commonly known among whalemens who have cruised in these seas as White Hog Island. The name originated from the fact of the abundant supply of white hogs to be obtained there in barter with the natives, and the entire absence of swine of any other color, so far as known to the visitors.

I happened in the course of my wanderings to meet with and make the acquaintance of the old English captain who had left at the island the original stock of pigs from which so many had been raised. This was some forty years ago, dating back from the present writing, he being then in command of a brig from Sydney, and he had never since visited the place. But he had heard of many others having bought their supply of pork there, and felt rather proud of the circumstance of having sown the first seed.

He was as much puzzled as any of us about the immaculate whiteness of the pigs, for there was nothing peculiar about the breed, and he knew that some of the original stock were black, and some spotted, or mixed.

I had myself made several visits, on different voyages, to Achilles Island, always getting as many pigs as we wanted at that time, and always wondering at the strange fact that they were all white, not one being found with the least spot of any darker color. The natives always seemed to be friendly and well-disposed toward their visitors; and there was no difficulty in making a peaceable trade with them. But they never gave any intelligent answer to our inquiries for black or piebald pigs, either being or pretending to be exceedingly stupid when this subject was touched upon.

The circumstance was all the more strange, because at most of the islands in the Pacific, which had been stocked in like manner by passing ships, there were hogs to be found of every variety of hue that is to be met

with in England or America; and indeed black pigs and red pigs appeared to be rather plenty, as if the savages had perhaps preferred the white ones for their own eating. But it fell to my lot to work out a full solution of the mystery, when second mate in the old Gratitude, and how this came about forms the subject of my story.

I had been sent ashore with a quantity of hatchets, knives and hoop-iron, to barter for live pork and cocoanuts, and had two whaleboats fully manned, one being in charge of a Kanaka boatsteerer, and native of Tahiti, but the whole expedition acting under my orders. We landed among these people without fear, though we did not fail to take some precaution against surprise, and to look well to our arms, not venturing far from the landing-place at any time.

Some delay occurred in getting the hogs brought down, and meanwhile squally weather came up and obscured our ship from view. But the barter continued favorably after the trade fairly opened, and I suffered myself to grow careless, until a report from the small carriage-gun startled me, and I noticed that she had greatly increased her distance from the land, seeming to be influenced by a strong current. I was about to give the order to gather up everything and push off the boats, but another squall, more threatening in appearance than any before, induced me to hesitate again, and the wind soon after increased to a hurricane, while the Gratitude was entirely lost sight of in the gloom.

It now became evident that I must remain all night among these people, and probably it might be several days before the ship could return to take us off. So we set to work to haul the boats high up on the beach, and secure everything for a permanent stay on shore. In this the natives were glad to assist us, and seemed pleased at the chance to offer us every hospitality within their means. We made ourselves comfortable for the night; but as I felt the importance of keeping my men together and not allowing them to quarter round singly in different houses, a place was assigned to us in a sort of public building or

council house, where we ate and lodged, receiving visitors through the evening, as they called upon us, but keeping well together, and sleeping on our arms, with a guard posted and regularly relieved.

The storm lasted thirty-six hours, when it blew all out, having done no material damage on shore, and the usual fine weather of that latitude set in again, but no ship was to be seen, and we were compelled to make out our log for a further stay. But it must be confessed that after two days had passed, as our relations with our hosts were perfectly harmonious and pleasant, our precautions were much relaxed, and our discipline much less rigorous. We ventured to separate more from each other, and to stroll about in various directions, making observations, until nearly the whole extent of the island had been explored by some one or more of our party. Still no ship came, and the length of our imprisonment became uncertain. We had discussed the subject of the whiteness of the pigs that were very numerous about the island, and on comparing notes it appeared that no one of our number had ever met with one who had the smallest spot of any darker color on the whole surface of its skin. We came to the conclusion that the islanders must kill all but the white ones at birth, but in this view of the case, the great number of swine running everywhere at large seemed sufficiently marvellous.

On the fifth day of our sojourn, I was sitting in the house, resting after having taken rather a long tramp in the heat of the day, when the Kanaka boatsteerer, Aleck, as he was called, put his head in at the door, and beckoned to me.

"What's up now?" I asked, as I followed his call, for there was a peculiar expression of fun in the Kanaka's eyes, and his nostrils were snapping as only a South Sea Islander's can do.

"Come, take walk with me," said he. "Got something to show you."

He struck into a path which led away toward the centre of the island, where the land was considerably higher than near the sea margin, and the cocoanut trees grew nearer together, making a deep and cool shade.

I had until now supposed this grove to occupy the whole middle of the island, and thought there was nothing worth exploring in it or beyond it. Aleck led the way into

the grove, and we wound our way between the trees for a considerable distance, when the grove became more open and scattered, and we emerged into a clearing of such extent as to prove that the island was larger than I had believed it to be. Aleck still led me on till we came to the brink of a jumping-off place, while the mystery of the *lost tribes of swine* was explained at a glance.

We looked down in a depression or basin covering an extent of perhaps a couple of acres, and nearly circular in form.

The coral builders appeared in this case, as in many others, to have done their work so as to make a ring, leaving a large hole in the centre, which in process of time had become filled up so as to form a surface of dry ground, with some luxuriant vegetation growing upon it, and having its level only a few feet below that of the surrounding elevation. And at the bottom of this natural basin, running at will over its extent, were many hundreds of hogs and pigs of all sizes—black pigs, red pigs, spotted pigs, in short, everything but white ones.

The sides of the basin were precipitous, preventing all chance of escape, except at one point where the land formed a shelving incline, and here the natural pigpen was made perfect by art; a wall composed of logs and coral boulders having been rudely built to close the gap.

There were but few trees of any great size rooted down in the basin, though there were many smaller ones in various stages of growth, and it did not appear that the spontaneous production of the place could be sufficient to feed all its inhabitants. But even while we stood thinking of this, several men appeared, approaching the verge on the side opposite to where we stood, and bearing large bunches of cocoanuts, which they proceeded to break up and throw down among the pigs.

"It must cost something to feed this herd," said I. "I should suppose the island would produce none too much for its human stock and the white pigs. But what does it all mean, Aleck?"

"*Taboo*," answered the Kanaka, reverentially.

"*Taboo!* Yes, I suppose so, especially as the people seem to keep away from the place generally. But who are those fellows feeding the pigs?"

"*Oronoo*," said Aleck, in the same impressive tone.

I understood that Oronoos meant the priests or religious men, who were vested with certain powers and duties under the taboo, such as were entirely forbidden to ordinary mortals.

"But what do they keep and feed all these hogs for? Do they sell the white ones to ships, and raise these for their own eating?"

"No," said Aleck, with a forcible shake of the head. "No eat; kill all for *Silkaty*."

"And who is *Silkaty*, that wants so much pork?"

"What you call God," said the Tahitian.

"Ah! I see! they kill them all for sacrifice, eh? And when do they do this?"

"By'm-by; time near now. Two or three days more. Make big *hula-hula*."

Thus I made out, little by little, from Aleck, who had that morning met one of the Oronoos, with whom he could talk intelligently. This man had been away in a ship, and had in his travels visited the Society Islands, drifting back after the lapse of some years to his own country.

He had picked up a little of the Tahitian language, and also some words of English, though he was chary of using the latter. But my *Kanaka* had made the most of his opportunity, and aided by his own savage quickness, had learned enough to get a clear explanation of the mystery.

The grand ceremonies of the sacrifice of all the black and parti-colored hogs to the Great Spirit took place annually, at a certain time of a certain moon, for the calendar of these barbarians is quite accurate enough for all anniversary purposes. The slaughter was carried on down in the basin, but no one was allowed to descend into it except the Oronoos, who were only ten in number. But all the people could join in the work of slaughter, by forming a ring round the verge of the pit, and sending death among the frightened swine, by any means at their command, and using all sorts of missiles, as well as long spears for thrusting. The Oronoos might kill, too, but their principal work was to drive the herds of pigs about, and rush them in masses towards the side of the pen, so as to bring them within reach of the excited populace.

The enchanted ring was most rigorously tabooed, and the whole enclosure kept sacred ground, not to be polluted by the tread of any layman. And if, as happened sometimes, one fell down among the pigs below

while engaged in the work of slaughter, he was pulled out again, and compelled to retire in disgrace from the remainder of the ceremonies, undergoing purification for a certain number of days to be decided by the Oronoos.

I could easily imagine that the sport must have been exciting in the highest degree, and as the work was carried on night and day, until the last pig was slain, the actors in the strange drama were well exhausted when it was finished.

The bodies were all collected in heaps by the Oronoos, who seemed to have the hardest work to do, and huge bonfires were made, in which they were burned to ashes, while men, women and children gathered round the whole circumference of the pit, with wild songs and dances, making, as Aleck expressed it, "a big *hula-hula*."

To eat the meat of any pig other than a purely white one was a curse and an abomination unto these people; to kill one of the sacred animals at any other time than during the annual festival was a crime punishable with death, and moreover calling for the special vengeance of *Silkaty* upon the souls of the sacrilegious offenders.

The young pigs were taken in charge by the Oronoos, and all the colored ones, as soon as old enough to take care of themselves, were placed in the sacred taboo ground; but Aleck's friend had informed him that the number was growing less and less every year. There were only a few hundreds of parti-colored pigs now, where there were thousands a few years ago. It appeared to him that the great sacrifice to *Silkaty* must in time run out for want of material.

"Of course it will," said I. "Don't you see, Aleck, these blockheads don't understand that by slaughtering all the black hogs once a year, and keeping only white ones for breeding, they are going to have in time nothing else but white ones. So much the better for them in barter with ships, but *Silkaty* will be brought on short allowance, and finally be cheated entirely out of his dues."

I could not help reflecting what a wasteful and destructive policy these islanders in their religious zeal were pursuing, and how expensive this system of sacrifice must be to them. For not only were they killing so many fine animals which might have served as food for themselves, or as mer-

chandise for sale, but they were obliged to feed and fatten them all through the year, even at the risk of famine in their own household; for Silkaty, it appeared, was not to be put off with lean or scrawny pork.

The time for the annual massacre was now very near, and the Oronoos were eagerly watching the moon's horns, expecting in a day or two to issue their proclamation in Silkaty's name, and summon all his devoted followers to the work of blood.

The news of our discovery was soon passed from one to the other of my shipmates, and in the course of the day they had all paid a visit to the wonderful pigsty, greatly to the disturbance of the equanimity of the Oronoos, who had felt called upon to remonstrate and to warn them away. I took this opportunity, when they were all assembled at night around the council-house, to issue orders that no one should again go near the place during our stay; but I did not feel that my authority would have the same weight here as on shipboard. I heard some of our crew talking upon the subject after we had retired for the night, and Barney Powers, a young Irishman, who pulled the stroke oar in my boat, asked his next neighbor what he thought these heathen would do if all their taboo pigs should happen to break loose and get out among the white ones?

Both men enjoyed a hearty laugh at the droll idea, but they were soon snoring, while I lay awake, thinking further upon the subject, for Barney's remarks had been to me very suggestive. Sure enough, what *would* they do if any one but a duly qualified Oronoo should dare to touch one, much less to kill one or lame one, under pain of incurring the eternal displeasure of the Silkaty.

Daylight was already shining through the chinks of the house, when I was roused the next morning by strange outcries, and hurriedly pushing open the door, perceived that the whole village was astir, and that people were running back and forth, as if something very unusual had excited them. I naturally looked seaward, thinking that the arrival of a ship might have produced such an effect, but no sail was visible.

"Here! here!" said the Kanaka boat-steerer. "Look!"

I *did* look, and beheld the key to the whole mystery. Five or six black and spotted pigs fraternizing with as many white

ones, rushed past the doors, heading straight for the huts in the plain below; and more were to be seen in the background, coming down from the interior.

Two of the most venerable of the Oronoos, with consternation depicted in their countenances, were making their best possible speed up toward the sacred pigpen, but it was evident they were too late to avert the catastrophe. The taboo pigs had all broken loose from their prison, and were swarming in every direction, singly and in squads, all over the island.

With the exception of the priests, the whole population, men, women and children, fled to the waterside, and were to be seen with every indication of haste and mortal terror, launching all the available canoes of every description.

"What does all that mean?" asked one of another.

"Mean," said Aleck, with conscious superiority of understanding, "mean taboo. Kanaka afraid to touch taboo pig—no can live here—go big water."

Despite the impression produced upon me by the sight and sound of such a horrible panic seizing upon a whole nation of people, the words of my tawny shipmate broke the spell, and we roared with laughter till our sides ached. There was something so irresistibly funny in the idea of a whole population about to abandon their homes, as the Moscovites did the doomed city of Moscow, and take up their abode upon the waters of the Pacific, driven out by a herd of swine. The plague of locusts would have been a trifle to these benighted islanders, compared with the abomination of coming in contact with red or black pigs.

Before the sun was half an hour high a cordon of canoes filled with jabbering barbarians encircled the island at a distance of a quarter of a mile or less, while the ten Oronoos and twelve seamen from the Gratitude formed the entire garrison, so far as human beings were concerned, and the great army of pigs held full possession, roaming everywhere at will. We now assembled together for a council as to what should be done in the emergency, and were enabled to get at a sort of understanding through the medium of the boatswain Aleck, and the travelled Oronoo, who spoke a little bad Tahitian, and less of worse English. The people must remain in their canoes until the parti-colored porkers were all

secured in their enclosure, unless the proper time arrived for the great feast of the slaughter before this could be done.

The wise men who had been taking lunar observations for several nights past believed the time would come within the next forty-eight hours. And after that happy moment should arrive, it was possible by very elaborate ceremonies to lift or suspend the taboo so that all the people might take part in the hunt without being endangered by contact with the unclean beasts.

To attempt with our small force to get them back to their place of confinement seemed an endless undertaking, one which the Oronoos, with their characteristic love of idleness, certainly would not undertake. For all the pigs of the island were now ranging promiscuously together, and no white ones must be driven in, or permitted to get into the sanctuary, every colored one must be singled out, and taken care of separately; and above all, no pig must be killed, or in any way maimed or injured previous to the appointed time. The job of securing them was too big a one, involving too much downright hard work, so the priests lay down under the shade of the palm trees, and probably consulted with Silkaty, while we visitors also took our ease, and discussed the question, "How the pigs could have broken loose?" without arriving at any satisfactory conclusion. I thought I saw something in the twitching of young Barney's face which was to me sufficient evidence of the truth, but he stoutly denied all knowledge of the matter, and I did not press the accusation hard against him.

The rude wall, the only part of the prison built by human hands, had been undermined by pulling away a log at the bottom, and leaving a gap, out of which the pigs could pour, a dozen at a time. But who had done the mischief?

I knew that of course the savages must suspect that I or some of my people were guilty of this sacrilege, and had reason to fear that after the days of slaughter were over this subject would come up next in order at the council, and might place us in great danger, if our ship did not arrive in the nick of time.

We endeavored to show our good-will by volunteering to assist the Oronoos in anything to repair the mischief, but they only pointed to the heavens, and gave us to understand that they meant to wait for the

signal from Silkaty, which the moon's horns would soon give them.

All that day matters remained the same, the clamor of tongues encircling us, and sometimes a canoe venturing in near enough to receive provisions on board, returning as soon as possible to her station in the fleet.

At night the ten wise men sat down to continue their astronomical observations, while we, intrenched in our own fortress, set a regular watch, and awaited the issue. At about midnight we heard the Oronoos begin a kind of wild chant, which swelled louder and louder upon the stillness of the night, while all the voices of those in the canoes were hushed. Soon afterwards a bonfire was kindled, and then the chants and incantations were continued, more earnestly than before.

Aleck said that all this must be a part of the ceremonies of lifting the taboo, and that as soon as this was finished we might expect the people ashore to begin the work of slaughtering Silkaty's hogs, wherever they were to be found.

They would not want to pen them up, he said; they would kill every colored pig on the island, and their next movement would most likely be for vengeance upon us. We accordingly made our preparations as quietly as possible for instant departure. The ceremonies of lifting the taboo were at last finished, the bonfire being suffered to die out, and the most perfect silence fell upon the island, broken only by the sounds of the gentle breakers over the low coral reef. Not a voice was audible from the multitude in the canoes—not even a paddle dip broke the stillness, and the Oronoos sat in a group for at least two mortal hours, motionless as so many statues in bronze.

It was as I judged nearly daybreak, and we were getting fearfully impatient at the long suspense, when suddenly a blast from ten great conch-shells—such a blast as might have thrown down the walls of an ancient city—announced that the moment had come when every man, woman and child was free to join in the sacrifice to Silkaty. The welkin rang with shouts and outcries, while a simultaneous rush to the shore was made by the hundred canoes. The whole population jumped ashore, eager for the work of massacre, and the pigs themselves joined in the clamor, as if they knew and understood the impending peril. My men sat crouched under the shadow of the boats, ready and

waiting for the moment to arrive. At the very height of the noise and confusion consequent upon the landing of the savage hosts, away went the two light boats sliding down the slope into the smooth water. We leaped lightly into them, and in an instant were drifting out into the lagoon.

The oars were shipped with marvellous quickness, and though the Oronoos, on perceiving this movement, gave an alarm at once, no one attempted to stop us, for the daylight was breaking, and the all-important business of slaughtering pigs for Silkaty absorbed universal attention as their first religious duty. A few strokes of the oars sent us outside of the reef, where we lay surveying the scene at our leisure, and with little fear of attack, for once afloat we did not fear twenty times our own number of such enemies as these.

The islanders gave themselves up to the hunt with the most perfect abandon, spearing and stoning the poor beasts wherever found, and yelling and howling like so many incarnate demons. Now and then we could

see a group of them while pausing to take breath, pointing towards us, and shaking their weapons as if eager to attack us; but as the sun rose over the island, a sail was visible in the offing standing in towards us, and before noon we were again on board the Gratitude.

We cruised in the neighborhood two or three days, while the festival of blood was in progress. The bonfire of pork illuminated the sky at night, and the burnt-offerings were doubtless grateful to the nostrils of the mighty Silkaty.

When all was over, we finished our barter for white hogs, but were careful not to trust ourselves again completely in the power of the natives by going on shore.

Barney, the young Irishman, was as I had expected, the author of all the trouble, having let the pigs out from sheer love of mischief, for he afterwards, at sea, confessed the fact, and we had many a hearty laugh over our serio-ludicrous adventure at White Hog Island.

WHY I AM STILL A BACHELOR.

Belle, Stuart

Ballou's Monthly Magazine (1866-1893); Dec 1877; 46, 6; American Periodicals
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WHY I AM STILL A BACHELOR.

BY BELLE STUART.

"Handsomely furnished back parlor with every comfort and convenience to let with excellent board, No. 35 Arnold Place."

Such was the attractive announcement which met my gaze one Monday morning, long years ago, as I cast my eyes over the advertising column of the London Times. The good lady with whom I had been lodging for the past six years or more had thrown up her lease, given up housekeeping; and I was e'en forced to secure another home ere night-fall, or submit to the inconvenience of finding myself thrust shelterless upon the street.

Accordingly, placing the above-mentioned address, together with several others, upon my memorandum book, I set forth upon my wearisome, disagreeable quest, than which there is none more wearisome or disagreeable, I most solemnly believe. By far the greater portion of apartments inspected

proved first-class—frauds; but the one set forth in such glowing terms at the beginning of this sketch was all that it claimed to be, and more, and I engaged it upon the spot, of the landlady, who, by the way, was an exceedingly refined and ladylike personage. Now do not, I pray you, fair reader, think to weave a romance upon that statement, for as the lady alluded to was fifty at the very lowest estimate, and I but just turned twenty-eight, I fear you will be grievously disappointed.

The early dawn of a February evening found me, Gerald Francis Pembroke, together with my luggage, consisting of two trunks, a bag, a portmanteau, an umbrella, and a mocking-bird, duly installed in my new quarters, where, quickly removing the traces of dust from my clothing, performing necessary ablutions, and arranging hair and cravat to a nicety, I sat me down in an easy-

chair drawn invitingly before the fire, to await the tinkling of the supper call-bell. And in this interim of waiting, I amused myself by taking a more minute survey of the apartment than I had as yet attempted.

This had evidently been the family-room in the days ago, before taking boarders had become a necessity, and the family portraits were still suspended from the walls. There, upon one side, was an old, old lady in cap and spectacles, staring benignly upon an old, old man, with silvery locks and wrinkled cheeks, upon the other side; there at the end hung a full-length portrait of a young soldier in all the conscious pride of new uniform and glistening sword; whilst just opposite and directly over the mantel-shelf was a representation in oil colors of a young girl of some eighteen or nineteen summers, I should judge. A pair of large, soft, lustrous brown eyes, over which the long lashes fringed gracefully; a nose, small, well-formed, delicate pink cheeks; a broad, intelligent, finely developed forehead; and two rosy, pouting lips parted with just the shadow of a smile, completed a face the most transcendently beautiful of any that it has ever been my good fortune in life to behold. I was entranced, enraptured; and sat there, lost to all outside occurrences, gazing with intoxicated admiration and delight upon the last-named painting, until long after the tea-bell had sent forth its clanging peal, until the house-maid, weary no doubt of awaiting my appearance, had admonished me by a gentle knock at my door that my presence was solicited below.

I hastened back, immediately the meal was despatched, to the contemplation of that bit of painted canvas which had so attracted, fascinated my inmost heart; and in its contemplation passed the entire evening, to the utter exclusion of letters and papers which should have claimed my attention. And as the days and weeks went by, this attraction, this fascination, but deepened in intensity; it seemed that I could not gaze sufficiently long or often upon the handsome portrait, which, aside from being the representation of a face of surpassing loveliness, was emphatically a masterpiece of art. I was fond, I was proud of it; it lit up, illumined, inhabited as with a visible presence my otherwise somewhat lonely bachelor apartments, and its sweet image lingered ever near me, haunting my dreams by night, dancing about my bed and day-book

and floating around me in the air, by day. And yet, ardently as I had desired to know, and as many times as it had been on the tip of my tongue to inquire, I had never dared question the landlady as to the original of "my picture," as I was pleased to style the painting, fearing lest the unwelcome revelation that the fair divinity therein depicted had merged into a matron, fair, fat and forty, into an old, old lady, perhaps, with her grandchildren clustered about her knee, or had for long been treading the streets of the New Jerusalem, should topple my fair, romantic castles ignominiously to the ground. So I remained in wilful ignorance, loving, admiring, worshipping.

As I was returning from the office one afternoon some six or eight weeks subsequent to my entrance upon my new lodgings, I observed an express wagon, from which some men were removing a trunk labelled "Lillian Montrose," drawn up before the door. "Ah! a new lodger," I carelessly murmured; and bounding up the steps and into the hall, was just in season to behold a slight, trim little figure, attired in a fashionable costume, disappear up the stairway to the floor above. I passed on to my room, and gave no further thought to the stylish new-comer, until, upon descending to the supper-room, I was arrested midway between the door and my seat by the words from the lady of the house, "Mr. Pembroke, this is my sister, Miss Montrose."

My heart leaped to my throat; my pulses stood still; my eyes distended with eager, startled gaze: for there upon the other side of the table, smiling bewitchingly, murmuring some polite phrases of greeting, sat—the original of "my picture."

I suppose I stammered forth some fitting response to the introduction; I know I sank dazed, bewildered, into my seat at table; but whether I ate what was set before me, "asking no questions," as a reasonable man should, or whether I left it all untasted, has always remained, and always will remain, an unsolvable mystery. I fear, however, that I acted altogether in an exceedingly strange and incomprehensible manner, for I had eyes, ears, and thoughts for naught save that sweet face opposite, so like its counterpart on canvas, and yet so wondrously, inexpressibly more beautiful.

We all gathered after tea, as by common consent, in the cosy, cheerful little parlor, attracted thither by the sparkling eyes, the

laughing lips, of Miss Lillian Montrose, and were entertained agreeably, pleasantly, during the entire evening by that charming young lady. She gave us an interesting, racy account of her recent journey by coach, causing us at one moment to laugh merrily, uproariously, at some amusing incident thereof, at the next to shed tears of pitiful sorrow as she recounted, with tears in her own soft eyes, a tale of distress and woe poured into her sympathizing ear. And then she sang for us, and oh, such singing! I presume it would not have pleased the attuned ear of a professional musician, but it pleased me as had never music pleased me before. This evening, happy, joyful, delicious, was but a fair specimen of the many succeeding ones passed in the agreeable society of this captivating young girl; and we had cause, we staid, sober lodgers, to bless the day when her gay, blithesome spirit appeared in our midst.

Now it was not at all in the nature of things that I could flit so near this brilliant light, and escape with unscorched wings; nor did I. In fact, at my first meeting with the charming creature I had been inoculated with that disease, common yet none the less fatal, which is disseminated by fair Cupid's arrows, and every additional interview, glance, word, but sent the blood coursing more wildly through my veins, until at last the malady had taken such complete possession of my heart, of my very being, that I felt a willing captive at my charmer's feet. And, believing as I did that I could discern signs of a dawning affection for me in the sweet girl's heart, I felt emboldened one bright, never-to-be-forgotten evening to put the question, which, had it been answered in the negative, would have blasted all my hopes and interests in life.

The days flew by joyously, delightfully; week succeeded week, month, month, and we counted them not, nor heeded their flight. We were thoroughly, unreservedly happy, Lillian and I, living entirely in and for the present with never a thought or care for the future. We did not talk, as do most lovers, of our marriage, and plan for our after settlement in life; indeed, I have no recollection of broaching the subject but once, and then Lillian interrupted with a quick, eager, "Never mind the future, Gerald; we are happy now, and that is sufficient;" and ever after, as if by tacit agreement, the topic was avoided by both. Could

it be that a prevision of what that future had in store for us floated dimly through our minds?

We loved one another with a tender, devoted love, such as is seldom experienced by mortals here below; with the love of a lifetime. Her dear face was the last thing which I beheld of mornings, as I reluctantly departed for my place of business, and the first my eager eyes encountered as I returned weary and worn at night. How well I remember the sweet picture as she would sit at the window watching my return. How her face would light up with pleasure and delight; how the bright smiles would dimple and dance about her rosy lips as I turned the corner and waved a merry greeting. I can still see through the dim vista of the years the love-light flash into her beautiful eyes; I can still hear, echoing through the long, lonely corridors of time, her joyous word of welcome; I can still feel, tingling through my veins, thrilling to my heart's core, the touch of her dear arms about my neck, the pressure of her sweet lips upon my cheek.

One night, however—how well I remember it, alas!—she was not watching for me as had been her custom, but upon my entrance into the hall she hurried down the stairs and threw herself with a sob and a torrent of tears into my outstretched arms; and when her emotion had sufficiently calmed itself, informed me that news had that afternoon been received of the illness, sudden, severe, most probably fatal, of a sister residing in a distant city; a sister dearly loved by both Mrs. Holmes and Lillian, but passionately loved by Lillian, of whom, indeed, she was a twin. Mrs. Holmes, owing to the many duties and cares requiring her attention at home, could not repair to the sick-bed, but Lillian departed thither by the evening coach, leaving me sad, lonely, desolate.

The next day but one after Lillian's departure, my heart was made glad by the receipt of a letter from her, tender, loving, breathing forth earnest, sincere devotion in every line. Dear precious letter! the first and the last ever received from my affianced bride; rather would I part with a ten thousand pound note, yea, with a dozen of them, than with that little bit of faded, yellow, crumpled paper!

Well, the sick girl died and was buried, and Lillian returned to No. 35 Arnold

Place. I hastened home to greet her as soon as I could be spared from the office, and without pausing to remove either hat or overcoat, hurried to the little sitting-room upon the second landing, in which Lillian Montrose was sitting, clad in robes of the deepest sable, her hands folded in listless attitude upon her lap, her eyes gazing dreamily into the blazing fire. She glanced up at my approach, but turned her head away again without a word. Surprised, pained, I sprang forward and clasped her to my heart, murmuring my joy and delight at beholding her again, my sincere sympathy for her in her sad bereavement, and interspersing the eager words with tender, passionate kisses.

But not by so much as a pressure of the hand, or a loving word, did she respond to my rapturous greeting. She evinced no pleasure whatever at seeing me; and as soon as released from my embrace, relapsed once more into that dreamy, semi-conscious state in which I had found her. Nor, as the days went by, did this apathy, this indifference toward me and all surroundings, pass away; on the contrary it appeared rather to increase. She did not shed a tear, had not, they said, since her sister died, but maintained a calm, unmoved, stoical demeanor, scarcely ever speaking unless addressed, and taking no sort of interest in anything. How unlike my bright, vivacious, enthusiastic Lillian! I could not understand the change; I did not dream it could be permanent; I could only watch and wait, and hope for better things.

One morning, some ten or twelve days subsequent to the occurrence of the sad event which had so altered my betrothed, we were lingering over the breakfast-table, she and I, after all the rest had departed, she gazing absently into vacancy, I leisurely sipping my coffee, and recounting an amusing incident which had the day previous come under my notice. And while I thus gayly chatted a peculiar change passed over the quiet, impassive Lillian. A crimson flush swept over her face, pale as marble before, swept over her delicate features, mantled clear to the roots of her hair, and then vanished as quickly as it had come, leaving only a bright hectic glow upon either cheek; into her eyes sprang sudden fire and light; whilst one hand crept slowly, stealthily along the table until within reach of a large carving-knife lying near.

Before I could understand her intent or purpose, she had started to her feet, had caught up the knife with a low cry of stifled rage, and was rushing toward me with blazing, glaring eyes, and I had barely time to spring from my chair, and elude the deadly blow aimed at my throat. The next moment, however, she was at me again, determined to accomplish her mad design. I endeavored to catch her hand and wrench the weapon from her grasp, but, with one swift motion of her arm, she broke from my clasp, and I was forced to run for my life.

Out into the hall and up the stairs I sped, closely followed by the young lady, enraged, maddened, brandishing the weapon menacingly in the air. But she was fast gaining upon me, my pursuer; I could not much longer hope to escape her fleet step; and turning hastily I snatched the knife from out her unsuspecting hand, hurled it to the floor, placed my foot upon it; and throwing my arms about the girl, I endeavored to subdue her excitement. However, she, who at other times was as a child in my grasp, was now entirely beyond my control, and there ensued a death-struggle which might have proved highly disastrous to me, had not some of the lodgers, attracted by the noise and commotion, hastened to my assistance.

Fastening her white arms securely together with stout cords, we bore the poor girl, struggling, writhing, gnashing her teeth, to her apartment, and laid her trembling form upon the bed, from which it required the utmost exertions of two stout men to prevent her from springing; whilst I, perceiving that my presence but distressed her, but incited her to fresh, uncontrollable spasms of frenzy, passed to my own room, whispering to Mrs. Holmes to join me there with news of the poor girl's condition as quickly as possible.

This she did directly the physicians had made their visit, and departed again declaring there was nothing they could do for the patient; and related to me a sad, sad story, a story which separated my beautiful, precious betrothed and I as absolutely, as irrevocably, as though ten feet of sod lay piled above us. It appeared that for many, many years the family to which Mrs. Holmes and her sister belonged, had had one or more of its members in each generation attacked by raving, incurable insanity. It had always made its appearance suddenly, without pre-

monition or warning; had invariably fastened upon the most attractive, the most intelligent; and, O terrible thought! awful reality!—Lillian, the fair, sweet Lillian; seemed the one selected in this generation for the dire attack. A predisposition, a decided tendency to it, in her case had been hastened, precipitated by her recent bereavement; and the doctors gave it as their opinion that the dread malady would never yield to healing remedies, and advised her speedy removal to some place of confinement.

I dismissed the distressed landlady from my presence as speedily as decency would allow, and double barring and locking the door, shut myself in with my disappointment, with my grief, and battled alone with the bitter anguish of my soul. How long I staid there I know not, nor in what manner I passed those long, awful hours. But this much I know, that whereas my hair had been black as a raven's wing upon that fatal morning, when next I glanced at it in the mirror the silver threads were profusely sprinkled amongst the black.

It was a beautiful morning in May when I started with my precious charge for the private asylum at G—. The buds were swelling, the grass was springing up soft and green, the birds were singing joyously, and the sunlight fell golden bright over all things; all nature seemed in league to mock with its gay brightness my aching heart. Lillian, poor dear, believing herself upon a pleasure excursion, was as happy and gleeful as a child; and no one would for a moment have imagined that the stylishly dressed, beautiful girl at my side was a maniac being conveyed to an asylum. Arrived at the large, spacious building set apart for the care and protection of disordered minds, I summoned the superintendent to my side, hastily confided to him my instructions and wishes, clasped my unfortunate Lillian in a passionate, lingering em-

brace; and then, while her attention was momentarily attracted in another direction, stole noiselessly away, leaving her alone in her new home, leaving her there nevermore to depart from its sheltering roof until summoned to her long home in the skies.

Forty times the wintry snows have whitened the distant hills, forty times the roses have blossomed and faded, since that sad day, and my darling now lies peacefully sleeping under the daisies. Quiet, blessed sleep! happy, blissful release!

I have toiled and labored; I have travelled and studied; I have tasted of pleasure to such an extent, indeed, as my blasted hopes, my crushed heart, would allow. But, although I have mingled much in society both at home and abroad, and have encountered many handsome, brilliant, fascinating ladies, I have never met one who in my estimation could equal, in beauty and attractiveness, my lost Lillian, never one who could for one instant occupy her place in my heart. And that, dear reader, is *why I am still a bachelor*.

I still keep my bachelor apartments, although not with Mrs. Holmes—she, dear lady, has been long upon the other shore; and “my picture” still hangs above my mantel-shelf, my greatest, my only consolation. I am an old, old man now, with locks silvered by the fingers of time; with shoulders which will stoop a little in spite of my most strenuous efforts to the contrary; with a countenance upon which the crow's-feet have made innumerable crooked tracks. The years flow by peacefully as a midsummer night's dream, swiftly as a watch in the night; soon the last snow will fall, the last roses blossom for me, and “the scenes which have known me shall know me no more.” But I regret them not, these passing years, these gliding months, these fleeting moments, for each one but brings me nearer my eternal home, nearer my darling, my angel wife.

WHY THE DOCTOR MARRIED.

Morris, Anna

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WHY THE DOCTOR MARRIED.

BY ANNA MORRIS.

Of all improbable events, the most improbable seemed, that Dr. Brigham would ever marry.

Not that he was very old, for hardly more than forty years had passed over his head.

Not that he was very ugly, — for truth to tell he was rather a fine-looking man, or would have been, if his hair and beard had been trimmed, and his clothes looked a trifle more fashionable, or less threadbare.

Not that he was very poor, for he had a fair practice, and might have had a large one, could he have prevailed on himself to leave his beloved books, and attend more to business.

That was just the matter with Dr. Brigham. He was so utterly absorbed in his books that he knew nothing outside of them.

"Culture! Culture!" was his watchword.

If a man possessed what the good doctor

called "culture," it mattered not, if he were the possessor of nothing else. The doctor was his faithful friend, and staunch supporter.

Of course in a little, business town like Brenton, there were few, whose intellectual attainments came up to the doctor's standard, while his lack of worldly wisdom caused many to regard him as little better than half-witted.

Yet once rouse Dr. Brigham sufficiently to make him comprehend a case of sickness or sorrow, and the sufferer found a kind and devoted friend in him.

The only occasions on which the doctor would voluntarily leave his books, were when he visited the neighboring city in the hope of adding to his collection. Every dealer in second-hand books was familiar with the bent, shabby figure, that searched patiently for hours through huge piles of rubbish, hoping to unearth some musty

treasure at last; and many of them learned to lay aside any particularly old and battered volume until the next visit of Dr. Brigham, being almost certain that whatever no one else would buy he would seize upon as a choice acquisition.

Dr. Brigham was a writer as well as a student. True, few of his literary productions had ever seen the light, but the select few, whom he honored with a sight of his writings, declared them to possess uncommon merit.

Amongst the doctor's books which he most valued, was a rare old edition of some of the early Greek poets, which he had discovered some years before at a great book sale. There was a rumor that he had been so eager to gain possession of this work that he had bid against himself; hearing his own bid, as the auctioneer repeated it, and fancying it that of an opponent, and that he really had run the price up quite high, before discovering that no one out-bid him.

Be this as it may, the doctor's delight in his new possession would have been unbounded, but for the discovery that one volume was missing. True he had the same work in other editions,—had read and re-read it till he knew page after page by heart, but this was different,—another thing entirely.

"It is so *unique*!" he observed to a visitor to whom he was exhibiting his prize. "I would give ten times its value for that other volume."

"Did you ever see one like it?" he demanded presently, rather surprised at his listener's want of interest in the matter.

"Oh, yes!" was the quiet answer. "Miss Brooks has the same."

"What, the very same edition?" exclaimed the astonished doctor. "Are you quite sure?"

"Quite! She showed it to me one evening when I called there," answered his visitor, who was no other than Mr. Maynard, a young man who had lately assumed the duties of school-teacher in Brenton, and who found the doctor's well-filled library very inviting; while the doctor, having ascertained that Mr. Maynard was a man of "culture," gladly welcomed him at all times and seasons.

"Do you know," asked the doctor, slowly turning the pages of his last purchase, "whether Miss Brooks's copy is complete?"

"Entirely so," answered Mr. Maynard

rather maliciously. "I examined each volume particularly."

"Do you suppose she could be induced to part with it?" inquired Dr. Brigham after a long pause.

"Oh, I should say not," returned Mr. Maynard very decidedly. "She told me that she valued them very highly, as favorite books of her father's, and that no sum of money would tempt her to dispose of them;" which last assertion was entirely an invention of the young man's fertile imagination.

Dr. Brigham unconsciously sighed deeply. He was not naturally covetous, but he *did* want that odd volume, and it did n't seem as if a woman could appreciate it as he did.

His companion's lip curled slightly as he heard that sigh. "What a fool to care so much about a musty old book," he thought, but he only said, with a slight twinkle in his eyes, though his face was grave, "There is one way you might get that book, Dr. Brigham!"

"How is that?" cried the doctor, eagerly rousing himself.

"Why, you might marry the lady," answered Mr. Maynard quietly.

Dr. Brigham looked at his visitor in silent astonishment. Whether the idea of matrimony had never before entered his book-befogged brain, or whether he did not comprehend the remark, Mr. Maynard could not determine, but as the doctor made no rejoinder, and almost instantly appeared entirely absorbed again in the contemplation of his books, the young man finished searching for a review, which had been the reason for his visit, and with a careless "good-morning," which failed to rouse his host, sauntered out of the office.

Dr. Brigham sat for hours, turning a leaf now and then, drinking in the full beauty of each line as he read, till the sun had sunk low in the west, and the fading light in the little dark office caused the absorbed student to raise his eyes from his book.

"I had no idea it was so late," he muttered. "I promised to see one or two patients today,—and I think I must have forgotten my dinner." A glance at his watch convinced him of the truth of this surmise, and with a regretful look at the book, he took his hat and cane, and sallied forth.

The patients were visited, and he was on his way to his boarding-place to get some supper, instead of the neglected dinner,

when he passed a pretty cottage, half hidden in vines, and its little garden gay with flowers.

"Miss Brooks's house," soliloquized the doctor, remembering for the first time what Mr. Maynard had said in the morning. "I wonder if she would let me see her books," and without further ado, he crossed the street, and was soon knocking at the cottage door.

It was opened by a young lady, and at the sight of her, Dr. Brigham became embarrassed, and stammered out something about "Miss Brooks."

"Oh, you mean Aunt Maria," said the young lady pleasantly. "She will be at home in a few moments. She has only stepped into a neighbor's on an errand. Won't you walk in, and wait for her?"

Hardly knowing what he did, Dr. Brigham accepted the invitation, and was soon seated in Miss Brooks's little parlor, answering yes and no at random to all the young lady's attempts at conversation, and vaguely wondering whether angels always wore blue muslin to match the color of their eyes, and whether their hair always hung in golden curls about their faces.

Miss Brooks entering shortly, welcomed Dr. Brigham, and introduced her niece, — "Miss Nellie Brooks."

Whereupon the doctor dreamily recalled the memory of his old playmate Ned Brooks, who had married, and moved away from Brenton years before, and who was doubtless the father of this angel in blue muslin.

Miss Brooks's hospitality wished the doctor to stay to tea, and although bewildered, the good man did tolerate justice to the meal, after his day of fasting.

They talked, at least the ladies did, and doubtless Dr. Brigham said something in reply, though he did not know what it was.

It was a mercy that he ever remembered to take his leave; in fact it is doubtful whether he would, had not the younger Miss Brooks expressed a desire to hear one of his poems, which he promised to read to her, but on searching his pockets for it, he came to the conclusion that it must be at his office, and when he actually got on his feet to go for it, the thought struck him that it might possibly be growing late.

Examining his watch, and finding that the hand pointed to eleven o'clock, — an unheard-of hour for an evening call in quiet

Brenton, — he stammered some words of excuse, and departed as abruptly as he had come, leaving the two ladies astonished and amused.

"What brought him here, auntie?" inquired Miss Nellie.

"I cannot imagine," returned the aunt. "It is years since he has entered the house, though he used to be here frequently enough when your father and he were boys together. Probably some memory of that old time caused him to stop as he passed, and once here, he forgot to leave. Very likely he will not call again for a dozen years."

"What makes him so odd and shy?" pursued her niece. "He talks well, when he once gets started on a subject."

"He has lived so entirely in and with his books," answered Miss Brooks, "that I fancy he hardly knows how to behave when away from them. But come, Nellie, it is late, my dear. I cannot have you losing your roses from want of rest."

"I seldom go to sleep so early as this at home," laughed her niece, "but I know you do, so good-night, dear auntie."

When Dr. Brigham reached his office, his eyes fell on the books from which the volume was missing. "There," he exclaimed with a start, "I did not speak to her about that book. Never mind, I can go again tomorrow," and in order to fulfill the promise made to Miss Nellie, he selected the poem she had wished to hear, from a quantity in his portfolio, and put it in his pocket.

The next day saw him again at the door of the vine-covered cottage. Of course in a gossiping little village, two visits from a doctor could not pass unnoticed, and before night it was currently reported in Brenton that Miss Brooks was very ill, some said dying, — that her niece had come to take care of her, and that Dr. Brigham had called five times that day!

Certainly the last clause was untrue, for as the doctor's visit was nearly as long as on the previous evening, he could not have had time to repeat it.

Strange to say, when he returned to his office, his first exclamation was the same as on the evening before. "There! I did not speak to her about that book! Never mind, I can go again tomorrow!"

And this might have been his remark a y day, for the next three weeks, for every day saw him at Miss Brooks's cottage, yet every day seemed to bring something of so much

more interest to talk about, that he invariably forgot his book.

Forgot all his books, we might have said, Previous to these visits Dr. Brigham's whole attention had been absorbed in a series of articles he had been writing about the Greek orators; but now orators and orations lay alike neglected, while he read Tennyson or Scott, Browning or Whittier, aloud in Miss Brooks's cozy little parlor, and she and Miss Nellie listened and sewed.

Of course the inhabitants of Brenton had satisfied themselves that Miss Brooks was not ill, and equally of course they were full of surmises as to what could be the cause of Dr. Brigham's frequent visits to her house.

Mr. Maynard imagined that he was the cause, and meeting the doctor one day inquired mischievously, "Well, doctor, have you found the plan I suggested for obtaining that odd volume successful?"

The doctor stared at him for a moment in blank astonishment, then exclaiming, "Oh! I have never remembered to ask her!" hurried off as if he intended to go straightway and repair the omission.

Mr. Maynard looked after him, with amusement depicted in every feature. "What does the old codger mean?" he soliloquized. "That he forgot to ask Miss Brooks to marry him, or to ask about the book?"

In the mean time the doctor strode on, looking neither to the right or left, till he reached his office. Entering and closing the door he marched up to a little looking-glass that hung covered with dust and cobwebs, plainly testifying to its owner's lack of personal vanity. Hastily rubbing it clear he surveyed himself more critically than he had done, perhaps for twenty years.

The result did not seem satisfactory. He glanced with a disapproving air at his shabby attire, and forthwith proceeded to don his best suit of solemn black, which, as he had kept it for years to wear on such festive occasions as weddings and funerals, was rather antiquated, though as good as new.

His next move was to betake himself to the village barber, who by shaving, trimming and brushing produced such a change, that when, an hour later, he presented himself at Miss Brooks's cottage, that lady scarcely recognized him.

"Good-afternoon, doctor," she said, con-

cealing her astonishment as well as she could. "We thought you were coming this morning to finish the poem you were reading yesterday!"

"Ah, yes!" answered the doctor, in some confusion. "I did intend to do so, but was unfortunately detained. I trust your niece was—I mean—I hope she was not disappointed!"

A sudden light broke over the lady's mind, as she replied, "We were both disappointed, doctor. I must go out this afternoon, but Nellie will be happy to hear you read it now, if you have time."

The doctor made some inaudible reply, and Miss Brooks, summoning her niece, soon excused herself, in order to make some calls. On her return, toward tea-time, she found the still unfinished poem lying on the table, while the doctor, with an animation she had never before seen in him, sprang up at her entrance, and seizing her hand exclaimed, "Congratulate me, my dear Miss Brooks. Nellie has promised to be my wife!"

Miss Brooks glanced with some uneasiness toward Nellie, but that young lady set her doubts at rest, by saying with a smile and a blush, "Don't look troubled, auntie. Did n't I tell you yesterday that I should never marry unless I could find some one wiser and better than all the other men I knew?"

"And did you mean it?" began Miss Brooks.

"Yes, I did mean it," laughed Nellie, stopping the question with a kiss, "so congratulate us."

"But really, Dr. Brigham," said Miss Brooks, when they had settled themselves comfortably about the tea-table, "if you won't be offended at my asking, I should very much like to know what made you begin coming here. You did not know Nellie was here, so it could n't have been that!"

"Why, auntie!" exclaimed Nellie, rather shocked at her aunt's question.

But the doctor replied with the utmost simplicity, —

"Certainly, Miss Brooks, I will tell you. Mr. Maynard advised me to come and marry you, because you had a complete edition of the Greek poets," and amid Miss Brooks's looks of astonishment, and Nellie's peals of laughter, he related the whole conversation, concluding with, "So I thought I would

call, and ask you to let me see the books, but when I saw Nellie I forgot all about them; and every day I meant to ask, and every day I forgot!"

Here the laughter of both ladies was uncontrollable, but as soon as she could speak Miss Brooks exclaimed, "Well, that is the oddest wooing I ever heard of! I know what I will do, Dr. Brigham. I will give you the poets for a wedding present!"

"Thank you, my dear madam!" cried the doctor, in great delight. "Then I shall have all I want in the world, — Nellie and the poets!"

And meeting Mr. Maynard, soon after his marriage, the worthy doctor repeated this declaration, at the same time thanking the young man heartily for his good advice, which had, he assured him, made him the happiest man in the world

ZEDEKIAH'S SWEETHEART.

BY GEORGE L. AIKEN.

"Ah, my dear sister, I was in search of you. I have something most particular to say."

"Will it not keep? I have a hundred things to think of, and am very busy—"

"Doing nothing. Come, now, be serious, and listen."

"Oh, I know so well what you want to talk about—that eternal subject does so wear my spirits."

"Your spirits, Jacqueline, fortunately for you, are too bright to be easily extinguished, even by my dullness. The time may come, however, when you will not consider love so contemptible a theme."

"Love!—do I consider love contemptible?"

"Till you love as I love, you cannot understand what I mean."

"'Till you love as I love!—ha, ha! I assure you I do love at this present moment."

"Indeed?"

"Oh, dear, yes; a great many people."

"Absurd! How can you be so heartless?"

"Heartless! On the contrary, it is you that must have a little, mean, shabby, under-sized heart, only big enough to hold one besides the owner; now my heart is large enough to hold dozens. Your heart is a gig—mine is a horse-car."

"Is it thus you talk of love?"

"Yes; pray how would you have me talk?"

"I would have you silent. How little can you appreciate a love like mine?"

"How sentimental! Then you think me cold-hearted?"

"No, Jacqueline; and that adds to my astonishment."

"Pray give over being astonished at me; you'll find there's no end to it. My heart is as warm as yours—that is, in its own way; but while your affections run riot, and flourish away in the shape of romantic love, mine are carefully trained into several well-regulated friendships."

"A love will spring up one of these days, in spite of your regulations."

"Ill weeds proverbially grow apace; but at present I can boast a cup of heart's-ease. Shall I weed your heart, brother?"

"When Love has taken root, he is not so easily displaced. But do you condemn my choice, Jacqueline?"

"Condemn? no! I love Arlotta myself; but—"

"But what? May I not love her, as my sister does?"

"As your sister does, certainly; but—"

"'But' again. You think the marriage would disgrace our family?"

"Disgrace is a strong word; yet still it is not exactly the match your family might expect you to form. You left Boston when you were too young to know much of our Aunt Berry, dear old rheumatic, romantic soul, who, struck with Arlotta's beauty when she was an infant playing about her native village, took her from her rustic home, adopted her, and made her for many years her companion, pet, plaything, and—"

"Gave her the education of a lady."

"True; and died, leaving her not one penny to maintain her position in the society to which she had raised her."

"You, however, made some amends, for you treated her like a sister."

"A dear friend she must ever be, but there is no necessity for your making her my sister in earnest. So now let's change the subject—love talk is always interminable. Remember, I have advertised for a coachman today. You are to receive the applicants and select a good one."

"Depend upon my judgment."

Mr. Frank Leyburn, after a lengthy sojourn in South America, where he had been connected with a large mercantile establishment, having realized a handsome fortune, had returned to his native city of Boston.

He had taken up his residence with his only near relative, his sister Jacqueline. She kept up a fine establishment, in the house bequeathed by her father (she was several years Frank's senior), and had a tendency to literature and old-maidism.

She had for a companion a young lady who bore the name of Arlotta Berry, who had been adopted by Jacqueline's aunt, and educated as a lady. The old lady evidently intended to make Arlotta her heiress, for she loved her like a daughter, but unfortu-

nately, dying without leaving any will, the girl had been cast penniless upon the world—without friends or relatives, for the girl's parents had died since her adoption by Mrs. Berry.

From this dilemma she had been rescued by Jacqueline, always her friend, who kindly offered her a home. This offer was thankfully accepted. The two ladies, notwithstanding the disparity of their years,—Jacqueline was thirty, and Arlotta eighteen,—got along nicely together.

Frank could not fail to be impressed by the beauty and grace of Arlotta—a cultivated wild-flower in the hot-bed of society.

A month passed in her charming company completed her conquest over him. But whether he had achieved a like conquest over her heart was a problem he had determined to solve upon the first opportunity.

Chance afforded that opportunity that very day. Scarcely had Jacqueline left the parlor by one door than Arlotta entered by the other.

"Mr. Leyburnel" she said, glancing around; "excuse me, I thought to have found my kind benefactress here."

"Say, rather, your friend."

"My friend and benefactress."

"Surely she gives no—no reason to feel any inequality?"

"Oh, never! But I must not forget my humble origin—nor do I wish to forget it. Besides, though I shall never leave your sister while she requires my services, yet when she marries I shall go back to my native village."

"Perhaps you will marry first."

"I marry!—oh, no, never! that is, never until I visit my former home."

"Shall you visit it with regret?"

"Oh, no! with delight."

"Indeed. You wish to leave us, then?"

"Do not impute to me such ingratitude. I shall never forget your condescension."

"Condescension! That word should never be spoken between friends. You consider me your friend, do you not?"

"How can you ask? You must think me very ungrateful?"

"Ungrateful! Gratitude is as much out of place as condescension."

Arlotta looked at him a moment in silent bewilderment.

"I am very unfortunate today," she said, "or you are unusually fastidious."

"I am so; I scarcely know what I say,"

pursued Leyburne, nerving himself for the effort. "I have endeavored to conceal from myself the real state of my feelings towards you, but it is in vain. Arlotta, I love you!"

"Love!—love me! a dependent orphan?" cried Arlotta, with a surprise that showed such a declaration had been unexpected. "Impossible!"

"It is true, Arlotta. Habit, education, render you at least my equal, and in every quality of the heart and mind you are my superior."

"Oh, sir, do not say this!" exclaimed Arlotta, with pain.

"Am I, then, an object of aversion?"

"Aversion!—oh, no; but can you suppose that I forget my origin—my native village—my early associates?"

"I would not have you forget them."

"I scarcely know what to say: but your kindness deserves my confidence. It is my duty to be frank, even if it gives you pain. It is true that I was very young when I left the village—"

"Oh, yes, you were a mere child."

"Yes, I was a mere child; and yet—"

"You hesitate."

"Child as I was, I had one friend. You will think me foolish; he—"

"Well?"

"He loved me."

"Loved you!—what, then? Mere play-fellows—"

"He was but a very little older than myself, and yet he *said* he loved me, and I'm sure I loved him."

"A mere childish attachment."

"On his side, perhaps; on mine I prove that it was not so. How could I forget him? Being separated so entirely from the scenes of my childhood, my heart cherishes, perhaps more fondly, its early associations; and with every ramble, every enjoyment, the image of poor Zedekiah is connected."

"Zedekiah! his name is Zedekiah, then?"

"Zedekiah Piper; and he used to call me his little wife. I have never seen him since, and yet I have always felt as if I were betrothed to him. And, now my confession is ended; will you cease to be my friend?"

"Think not so meanly of me. Of my own bitter disappointment I will say nothing. I will use every effort to promote your happiness."

"Perhaps Zedekiah no longer lives," said Arlotta, musingly.

"Very likely. I beg your pardon, but, as

he was such a very little boy, he may have been taken off by measles, whooping-cough, croup, green gooseberries, or twenty accidents."

"And would you exult?"

"Should I not have cause?"

"Well—perhaps. We shall see."

And with this ambiguous speech, which was certainly not a very hopeful one, she courtesied to Mr. Leyburne and withdrew.

"Thus ends my chance of happiness," mused that gentleman, when he was left alone. "And yet what may be the fate of this boy, this playfellow? After all, it is but imagination that cherishes her attachment. I have, at all events, promised to promote her happiness, and I will keep my word."

There came a thundering ring at the front-door bell. A moment after a servant put her head in at the parlor door, and said:

"A man after the coachman's situation."

"Show him in here," replied Leyburne.

A pair of heavy boots stamped over the oilcloth in the hall-way, and a huge, ungainly specimen of the genus "Yankee" stumbled into the parlor with the ponderosity and awkwardness of an elephant.

"Heow d'ye du?" was his salutation, as Leyburne requested him to be seated.

He did so, and the mahogany creaked ominously beneath his huge bulk. He answered all of Leyburne's questions with the nasal twang so peculiar to that portion of our country which is yclept "Down East." He had had much experience, he said, in the management of horses. He had been a week in Boston, having come there to make his "fortin," though another motive had swayed him.

Had he any objection to name the nature of that motive? He had not. In his native village he had a little girl for a playmate that he was very fond of. He had always called her his "little wife," and she had promised to be such when he grew to man's estate. A rich lady, on a visit to the village, pleased with the beauty of the little girl, had adopted her, and taken her to Boston. The "gal," as he called her, must be pretty well off now, and it might not be a bad speculation to hunt her up and marry her.

"What was the little girl's name?"

"Arlotta."

"And his name?"

"Zedekiah Piper."

He had "turned up. Neither measles, whooping-cough, croup, nor green gooseberries had had the desired effect; the "little boy" was before him. But, as Leyburne gazed upon the stalwart proportions of Zedekiah, he could not realize how, by any possible chance, such a lump of animated humanity could ever have been a "little boy." At the same time an idea flashed through his mind. What if he were to bring Arlotta and Zedekiah together? Would not a brief interview destroy all that remained of her romantic, girlish passion? It was worth the trial.

"Mr. Piper," said he, "I congratulate you. One of those lucky accidents which sometimes befriend a man has befallen you. The lady you seek—your early sweetheart—your 'little wife,' is at present an inmate of this very house."

"Gosh all dingbats!" ejaculated Zedekiah. "You don't say so?"

"It is a fact, I assure you. Remain here a few moments, and you shall see her."

He went in quest of Arlotta, whom he found in the garden.

"Summon up your sweetest smile to reward me," he cried. "I bring great news."

"What do you mean?" she asked, in surprise, looking up from the rosebush she was tending.

"He is here—the happy man has arrived—the Amadis for whom you have made yourself such a model of constancy."

"What he?"

"Your faithful swain—the long (he is six feet two) cherished one—Mr. Zedekiah Piper, *in propria personæ*, is here to claim his 'little wife.'"

"Zedekiah here—in the house!"

"Yes, in the parlor. He came after the coachman's situation. It's like the last sensation novel. Take off your net; let your hair float like a golden aureola on your shoulders, and rush to his arms like a true heroine."

Not heeding his badinage, she hastened into the house and entered the parlor. Zedekiah arose suddenly at her entrance, which took him a little by surprise, upsetting his chair in the action, and scraping his best bow, which was by no means an elegant one. She hastened towards him with both hands extended in a glad welcome.

"Heow du yeou du, marm?" stammered Zedekiah, open-mouthed. "Be yeou the lady of the haouse?"

"Zedekiah," she exclaimed, "do you not know me?"

"Can't say I du, marm."

"What! have you forgotten me?—have you forgotten little Arlotta?"

"Be yeou Arlotta?" queried Zedekiah, in some doubt.

"Look at me and see."

"Gosh all dingbats! but yeou du look a leetle like her; but heow all-fired harnsome yeou have graown! Why, yeou look jist like a raal lady."

"I hope I have improved some in years," answered Arlotta, modestly; "and you—"

She could not finish the sentence, for she had not learned the fashionable habit of fibbing. He had not improved. There was little trace of her boyish swain in the great, awkward man before her. She could not help contrasting his uncouth figure with the elegant and polished Leyburne. Need we say who suffered by the comparison?

"So you be my 'little wife'? haw, haw!"

What a laugh it was!—it sounded like the neighing of a horse. His wife—ugh! she fairly shuddered at the thought.

"Gi' us a kiss!" cried Zedekiah, making a demonstration like a grisly bear when he menaces some unluckily hunter.

"Keep off, sir!" cried Arlotta, retreating from his huge paws.

"What's the matter?" asked Zed, in great surprise. "Yeou us'n't to be so squeamish when we were children."

"We are children no longer," returned Arlotta, with freezing dignity, which had a refrigerating effect upon her swain.

"Gosh all dingbats!" exclaimed Zed, as he glanced complacently at his huge limbs. "I a'n't exactly what you might call a baby."

"I will speak to Mr. Leyburne, and urge him to give you the situation you seek," said Arlotta, and she hurried from the room.

"O Mr. Leyburne, he is so changed!" she cried.

She did not stop to think what had brought Mr. Leyburne so close to the parlor door. Perhaps he had been listening. "All's fair in love," you know.

"Shall I give him the coachman's situation?" he asked.

"Yes—if you please," stammered Arlotta, blushing to the temples as she met his roguish look, and she hurried away to hide her confusion.

"Well, Zed, my boy," said Leyburne, entering the parlor, "what do you think of your sweetheart now?"

"She's as purty as a pictur," answered honest Zed; "but she's awfully stuck up."

"A little proud, eh?"

"Proud as a peacock, and with as fine feathers. Haow much mought she be worth?"

"She has no fortune, Zed; her patroness shamefully neglected her. She is entirely dependent on my sister's bounty."

"No money!" ejaculated Zed, looking very blue. "Say, squire, yeou know a thing or two."

"I believe so."

"I a'n't obleeged to marry her, am I?"

"Certainly not, unless you so desire. The engagement, if such it can be called, is not binding upon either side. But what is money compared to beauty such as hers?"

"Wal, I daon't knaow," replied Zed, dubiously. "'Money makes the mare go.' I guess I shall let her slide. Betsey Jane, old Perkins's darter, is a little sweet on me, and said she'd have me when I come back from Bosting—and old Perkins's got a good farm—there a'n't but six children, and when the old man kicks the bucket, Betsey'll come in for somethin' han'some. Yeou don't think Lotty'd break her heart about it, do you?"

"I think not. Between you and me, there is a young fellow very anxious to marry her, and if you resign her I think she will have him."

"He's welcome," returned Zed, magnanimously. "Jist tell him I said so."

Zed was engaged as coachman, and took his departure in a tranquil state of mind.

"You have destroyed the brightest dream of my life," said Arlotta to Leyburne, when next they met.

"I am ready to make you all amends."

"Would you be content with a second love?"

"No; you have never loved—this girlish fancy counts for nothing—unless you love me; do you?"

"A little."

"Enough to marry me?"

"I think so."

"And then you will try to love me more?"

"Ever so much!"

He clasped her in his arms, and she did not cry, "Keep off, sir!" If Zed lost his kiss, somebody else found his.

Zed drove the bridal party to church; and

I doubt if there was a happier person in the whole assemblage.

“You’ve got my little wife, squire,” he said to Leyburne, afterwards, “and it ’pears to me that yeou make a better team than I should. She was too good for me. The fact is, she was cultivated, and I graowed wild—that accounts for it.”



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THE RECTOR OF ST. LUKE'S.

BY JOHN A. PETERS.

I.

"THE Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him."

The words were clearly, distinctly uttered, full of an earnestness that appealed strongly to the feelings of the hearers; and from the luxuriously-cushioned pew in which she was ensconced, Agatha Hastings, only child of Judge Hastings, the one great man of the place, recently returned from a European trip, looked up in surprise as the deep rich tones of the minister of God rang through the ivy-draped, gothic stone church. She was a trifle disappointed with the *tout-ensemble* of the man, whose voice stirred her so profoundly. The white surplice shrouded a slender form not quite up to the medium stature of manhood, and critical Miss Hastings admired massive granitically-proportioned men; indeed, sneered at those who deviated greatly from her ideal type. A white scholarly face, destitute of a beard, with thin nervous lips, and beneath a broad high brow burned a pair of night-black orbs, whose glance could be mild as pitying St. John's, or stern as Rhadamanthus's, according as the occasion called for it. "Not in the least handsome," was Miss Hastings's verdict, as her eyes sought the page of her gold-clasped prayer-book; "*too small, too deathly pale.* But his is a face to command respect, albeit there is a look upon it, and gleaming from those piercing eyes, that tells me he has not yet found that peace 'which passes all understanding.'" And then, as the *Gloria in Excelsis* pealed forth from the beautifully-toned organ, presented by her father to the church of St. Luke's, she tried to listen to the music, and not speculate further concerning the minister.

"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

So ran the text of his sermon, a masterly production, by the way, clear and forcible, his imagery glowing, his delivery grand beyond Agatha had ever heard; now his voice was low and persuasive, stirring the hearts and bringing tears to the eyes of his audience; anon it rose higher, assuming a commanding tone, as he warned them of the danger—of the agony lying in the future for

those who heeded not the words, and repented not, wickedly pursuing the tenor of their way.

The benediction was pronounced, the congregation began quietly to disperse, and rising languidly and leaning on his gold-headed walking-stick, Judge Hastings said, *sotto voce*, to his daughter:

"A young man of uncommon talent—a power to the church—a St. John. I have never listened to such a discourse. I must make myself known to him at once, and take him home to dinner."

Agatha bent her beautiful head. "Not to-day, papa, please. This is our first Sabbath home, and it is so much pleasanter to be alone—our guest Madge, of course, excepted."

"Nonsense, Queenie. But here comes the rector, Mr.—Deuce take it! what's his name?"

"Mr. Hawthorne, papa," supplying the desired information.

"Ah! yes. How do you do, sir?" reaching out his hand to the young minister. "My name is Hastings. Pray allow me to congratulate you on the power you have over your audience, swaying it at your will. My daughter, Miss Hastings."

The rector bowed, taking in his the brown-kidded hand offered him, and allowing his eyes to dwell on her face. "A daughter of the gods, divinely tall, divinely fair." An upright exquisitely-fashioned figure, full of a languorous grace, with a face fair as Tennyson's "Maud's," the lovely gray eyes brimming with pride, the simple brown hat, with trailing spring wreath, half concealing the shimmering blonde hair that graced the shapely head.

The Rev. Richard Hawthorne dropped the hand instantly, and turned to the judge, who was saying in cordial tones:

"I was much pleased with your sermon, sir, and wishing to become acquainted with you without delay, want to take you home with us to dine."

"Thanks, Mr. Hastings; but making it a rule never to dine out on the Sabbath, I must perforce decline your kind offer, hoping at no distant day to accept it."

The judge, believing a repetition of his offer would be futile, did not repeat it; and after a few minutes' desultory converse, went down the aisle and out to his carriage, which was waiting at the steps, followed by Agatha. They entered the carriage, Judge Hastings and his exquisite daughter, and were driven away; and the rector, standing motionless on the steps, wondered why it was the world seemed a trifle fairer to him this morning than heretofore, and why the sun seemed to shed brighter, more refulgent rays upon the earth.

Judge Hastings's carriage rolled on, and Judge Hastings's fair daughter leaned back in her seat and gave herself up to a fit of musing. "That man has a secret in his life," she thought—"a secret which he dreads may become exposed to a censorious world. That brooding look in his eyes haunts me still. It was as if he expected to encounter some spectacle which, like the Medusa-head, would turn him to stone. What mystery hangs over that man! An awful one to blanch his face to such a cadaverous hue, and give such a haunting look to his mournful eyes, or—Goodness! what ails me? Am I becoming imaginative? I'll ponder no more on the man with the tragical air."

'Twas a lovely spring day, the air pregnant with the scent of lilac and apple-blossom, the sky overhead blue and cloudless. The mile intervening between the judge's country-seat and the church of St. Luke's was soon traversed by the fast-stepping horses, and the carriage stopped in front of a palatial residence of red brick, from which stretched a lawn of velvety green grass, ornamented by cordate parterres, overrunning with early summer flowers, and fountains whose glistening spray laved white statuettes at their feet. A young lady stood on the wide veranda, over which a network of Mexican vines ran, awaiting them—a guest of the Hastingses—Madge Lyman, a violet-eyed, dark-tressed girl, with a decidedly *retroussé* nose, who, feeling indisposed, had remained home from church.

"Back at last, loiterers! And awfully bored, I suppose, listening to an illiterate country preacher? Sorry I had not accompanied you."

"You missed a most excellent discourse, Madge." And Agatha Hastings plucked one of the green Mexican vines, and list-

lessly began pulling it to pieces. "Mr. Hawthorne is a talented and cultivated man—quite an improvement on old Mr. Rheunyn, who talked through his nose, and made such frantic gestures."

"Large?" And Madge eyed her friend, laughingly, aware of her penchant for colossal men.

"Nay, more's the pity. He is small, yet in nowise effeminate, a world of power in his glance and voice. But come; I'm going up stairs. You'll have an opportunity to try your charms on him ere long, *ma chère*."

"An opportunity I shall not allow to pass by unimproved," vivaciously retorted Miss Hastings's guest. "I must flirt, and this disciple of Paul is no doubt the most eligible man in Ashwood."

The next day Madge formed his acquaintance. It happened thus. The morning was radiant with May sunshine and May-flowers. Judge Hastings's daughter proposed a ride, to which her coquettish friend gleefully assented.

"By all means, Agatha; the morning is delightful; just sufficient breeze to render Sol's glance endurable. Malicious old thing! The only specimen of the male gender, by the way, whose eye I cannot coolly encounter. Order out the rig, Ag, and I'll make myself presentable. I warn you I shall flirt with all the country lads we chance to meet; even this young rector of St. Luke's shall not escape with impunity. My flirting proclivities are alarmingly developed, I can tell you."

"No need of telling, Madge, as I am already aware of the fact. But the Rev. Mr. Hawthorne will prove invulnerable."

"Indeed! I beg to differ with you, *la princesse*. Like Achilles, he is not invulnerable, as I shall show you. He can't resist my new 'gipsy,' with the stunning streamers." And humming a few bars of a popular song, she ran out of the room.

Equipped, she was certainly charming; fleecy garments touched up with rose-colored bows, a broad gipsy with floating rose-colored ribbons, under which her saucy face shone brightly. A pink rose; while Agatha, calm and fair in her grayish robe, and shawl, and simple morning-hat, could be compared to nothing but a stately white lily. Soon, in a tiny basket phaeton, behind a quick-stepping pony, which Agatha managed with ease, they were being bowled along the dusty highway.

"Madge, isn't it nice to escape our train of courtiers and be alone in this country village, in the midst of green fields and primeval forests, free to do exactly as we wish?" And Agatha hit the pony with her jewelled toy of a riding-whip, to accelerate his speed.

Madge gave her head a disdainful little toss. "I can't say I find it especially nice, Ag, to be deprived of all my suitors. I am fond of admiration, and like plenty of beaux in my train. I shall be heartily glad when the guests you've invited for the summer begin to arrive. Are there no nice fellows in town, Ag?"

"You incorrigible flirt! of course there are—Dr. Clive, for example."

"A follower of Esculapius," mused Madge. "Describe him, Ag, and let's see if he'll answer in case of emergency. Is he Thomsonian, Allopathic, Homœopathic, or—"

"He is an Eclectic," interposed Miss Hastings, anxious to check her friend's raillery. "As to his personal appearance, he is tall, straight as a Norway pine, with a certain Castilian style of beauty. His *manners are easy and agreeable.*"

"And resides in the country, and is a country doctor, visiting his patients in a dilapidated old gig. Nonsense! I'll wager, Ag, that he's as verdant as can be, and very much afflicted with *mauvais honte.*"

A peal of laughter broke from Agatha's lips. "Royalty itself would not abash him."

"How happens it, then, that you have not a penchant for this handsome physician? He is your style exactly. Tall, and swarthy, and wonderfully cool."

Miss Hastings proffered no reply; all her attention was bestowed on Bob, usually the most gentle of ponies, who was tearing along the road at a breakneck speed. "Whatever ails Bob?"

Out of the village on the highway they were now, the road curving a great dusty-backed reptile around a shelving bank; ahead, a frightful precipice yawning, over which they would be in a moment hurled to destruction, unless, O heavens! she could check the horse's speed or change his course. Alas! She sawed at the reins without effect, and white to the very lips, yet brave as a heroine, Judge Hastings's daughter turned to her terrified companion.

"Madge, there is no hope; we are going swiftly to our doom."

On, on sped the pony, mad with fright, and with closed eyes Agatha and Madge awaited death, when—

Between the precipice and the rushing horse sprang a man, slender and lithe, and, grasping the reins, threw all his strength in one mighty effort to turn his course. He succeeded, but was dashed to the ground, only to rise the next instant safe and sound, save for a few slight scratches on his face. Bob now stopped of his own accord a few paces further on, and stood still, quivering; while looking down the gulley, seamed with jagged rocks, whose heads were reared like beasts of prey, Agatha realized the awful death she had escaped. As yet she had not noticed her preserver. He came up now, and with surprise, not unmingled with regret, she beheld the rector of St. Luke's, the Rev. Richard Hawthorne. Why, she could not tell, but she felt as if she would rather owe her life to any other man. How brave he was! Cool and suave he came up to the phaeton, lifting his hat as politely as usual, in nowise moved. Over the gauntleted hand extended, he bowed.

"You were sadly frightened, Miss Hastings, I fear? May I ask the cause of the runaway? The pony does not look one bit vicious."

"Nay, he is the most staid of beasts generally, and I am a very skillful driver. I have an impression that something large and white flopped to the ground—a bird of plunder, minus wings, maybe," she added, lightly.

"Ben Andrews's kite, rather, Miss Hastings," he made answer. "He was flying it when I started to make a call on a sick parishioner of mine. The wind is not very strong this morning, and it has fallen to the ground. Ben must be more careful hereafter."

"How providential you happened in this direction, Mr. Hawthorne. You have saved my life and the life of my friend! Miss Lyman, the Rev. Mr. Hawthorne."

For once Madge forgot her coquettish ways, and after acknowledging the introduction, said, with warmth, "I can never be sufficiently grateful, Mr. Hawthorne, for what you have done. With all my heart I thank you. I shudder at the thought of what might have taken place but for you. O, I thank you, *thank you!*"

There were tears in her eyes, and she

looked so charming and grateful, that even the Rev. Mr. Hawthorne, not a little inclined to be a misogynist, regarded her with interest, a fact which was patent to the fair girl listlessly holding the reins. She tried to express her gratitude, but failed; the words came not. How ungrateful he must deem her! Again she made the attempt.

"Mr. Hawthorne."

He turned toward her, and as he did so the merest tinge of pink drifted over her marble-fair face. "Do not believe me unthankful. I—I wish—" She hesitated hopelessly, the pink in her cheeks changing to a deep carmine, while Madge looked on wonderingly. Whenever was Miss Hastings embarrassed before? The calla lily—her sobriquet among the men—was being metamorphosed into a blushing pink.

Madge's stare brought her to her senses, and the sentence so clumsily begun was prettily finished. He merely inclined his head, not caring for the evidence of gratitude, seemingly.

"Ladies, suppose you get out and rest a while. Your nerves must be all unstrung. The view from here is wonderfully grand."

Acquiescing to his petition, they were assisted out by him, he tying the horse to a butternut standing handily there. Agatha, fascinated, bent over the precipice, strewn with black boulders, over which a roaring cataract dashed its spray, its sides lined with trees, crooked and bent; one old hickory, with straggling branches, which had toppled over with age, bedded in amongst the rocks, looked not unlike the half-buried skeleton of an ichthyosaurus.

Upon a rock, medallioned with mosses, and lichens, and pretty wild violets, they seated themselves, letting their eyes wander over the picturesque scene presented to their view. All around them was a tangle of vines and shrubs, indigenous to the soil, and such an array of blue flowers, modestly lifting their tiny heads on their slender stalks, that Agatha thought with a certain writer, "the very heavens were upbreking through the earth." The rector began plucking a few of the timid violets growing there; throwing them together carelessly, now and anon inserting a sprig of green to vary the monotony of color. Two bouquets thus made he tendered to the two girls, Madge accepting hers with *empressement*, Agatha with a slight graceful inclination of the head, listlessly remarking, "They are

quite pretty—simple and fragrant. You display some taste in their arrangement."

"Not so," he remonstrated; "I've noticed that when gathering flowers, no matter how incongruous and out of harmony their hue, no matter how heedlessly you fling them together, they blend prettily; but take them apart, and try to arrange them, unless one be extraordinarily skilled in the art, they looked labored and stiff. Are you fond of flowers, Miss Hastings?"

"Indeed I am, excessively. Still autumn leaves and feathery ferns suit me better. From a child, when staying in my own pleasant home in the country, I have scoured the woods in quest of ferns. To me nothing that grows is fairer. I have quite a collection at home—in fact, father named our residence Ferndale to please me."

"And a beautiful green spot it is, Miss Hastings, with the whole western slope alive with jungles of bracken and beds of lady-ferns. Botany was a favorite study of mine in my boyhood days."

"And I am ignorant of the branch altogether; I am no botanist. I know and recognize plants by their common and not botanical names. Observe the egregious blunder I was guilty of whilst displaying the beauties of our greenhouse to a guest of father's, a poetical young man. 'Are you fond of *reseda odorata*, Miss Hastings?' he inquired. 'I cannot tell,' I replied, 'as I do not remember of seeing any.' The picture of astonishment he stared at me, till I believed he was becoming gorgonized. Then he laughed. 'Why, it flourishes here in luxuriant profusion; the very air is permeated with its fragrance. You have a sprig of it in your hair.' 'Then why not call it by its graceful name, mignonette?' I retorted, beginning to comprehend to what he referred. He was too elegant a philomath for me."

The rector laughed. "You are right, Miss Hastings; neither have I any taste for these sesquipedalian names. They weigh down the modest flowerets till they are not recognizable by their nomenclatures. How musical the waterfall, and what quantities of white spray it sends aloft," he added, noticing the direction her gray eyes had taken.

"But look below, sir, where it is shaded by those enormous evergreens, whose long arms hang over as if to embrace their fraternity on the other side, and it seems

tinged with green; further down it is black. 'Tis a living chameleon, ever changing color. What's the matter, Madge?" as the young lady with a scream bounded off the rock.

"An ugly reptile! There it is, with its black head peering up through that mass of vines. For heaven's sake, come away! The place is accursed! In danger first of being hurled over the precipice by Bob, in danger now of being bitten by snakes."

"Not a venomous one, Miss Lyman. Pray resume your seat. See how harmless it is," and Richard Hawthorne stooped down, and as Madge gave another scream, and Agatha eyed him in amaze, he picked up—a long crooked stick of a decidedly snakelike exterior.

Agatha broke out in a merry laugh, but Madge could not be prevailed upon to resume her seat. "I don't care if I was mistaken, and you are mean enough to laugh, Ag, and my cowardice is patent to you both, the place is infested with snakes. That may be a stick you are clutching in your hand, Mr. Hawthorne, but amongst those roots down yonder, I'm sure there is a nest of them. Ugh!" shuddering, "let's go."

"If you so desire, certainly." And Agatha rose from the rock, the cluster of violets in her hand. Again she bent over the chasm.

"What a fearful spot to meet one's death! the carriage-wheels were almost at its edge. If you had been thrown over in your attempts to save us, Mr. Hawthorne!"

"I would have been at rest. This world does not contain so much happiness for me, that—" As some men might curb an unruly steed, so curbed he the words upon his lips, the same haunting look creeping into his eyes that Agatha had seen there the first time she had met him. "I beg your pardon," he added a moment later, "what nonsense I'm discoursing! I have a pleasant parish, and my parochial duties though multitudinous and tedious at times, bring their reward. I work for a Master, who pays me in something better than gold."

They walked back to the carriage, Hawthorne assisting them in, then at Agatha's request, got in himself, took the reins, and away they went.

II.

VIOLET-GARLANDED May abdicated her throne in favor of June, Goddess of Roses, and right royally the fair sister ascended

and took possession of it, wielding her sceptre with the grace of a queen. At Ferndale extensive preparations were being made for the guests who were to arrive that day late in the afternoon. Some twenty were expected. The best rooms were put in order, the pictures garnished with trailing vines, statues were wreathed, and vases filled to the utmost with great creamy roses and buds whose edges were tipped with pink, while in every available cranny were placed pots of hothouse plants, emitting sweet odors, and ferns whose heads bent languidly downward. Madge was in a fever of excitement, but Agatha moved about quietly as ever, giving orders to the servants, and now and then putting the finishing touches to some of their arrangements. She was attired in white, with a broad blue sash knotted about her waist, and a fillet of blue fastening up and keeping in place her sumptuous blonde hair.

"How cool and fair you always look, Agatha," said Madge. "No matter how uncomfortably hot the weather is, it has no effect whatever upon you. A calla-lily—the name attached to you by your admirers—suits you to a T. I prove an excellent foil to you with my small features, dark hair and sallow complexion."

"Fie! Madge, what an ugly temper you are in to-day. Are you not aware that people invariably admire their opposites? A bright piquant brunette would carry off the palm for beauty in almost any assemblage."

"Yes, where lackadaisical blondes are present, no doubt. But take a spirited blonde like yourself—for you are spirited in spite of your slow motions—and you overshadow them completely. But come! to pass away the time till the arrival of your guests, let's take a ramble in the woods. Will you take your sketching-book?"

"I believe not this morning. Frederika Bremer's 'Neighbors' is just the book to while away the time, not so exciting but that you can lay it down at any moment, and sufficiently interesting to keep your eyes upon its pages."

"As you please. I shall take a basket in which to deposit my treasures, for I am going on a pilfering expedition."

Donning hats, one with a basket on her arm, the other with the "Neighbors" in her hand, they started on their way.

"It is so dull, Agatha," complained Madge. "I do wish Mr. Hawthorne was

along to act as cicerone. He is undoubtedly a fascinating companion, if he is a preacher of the gospel. Where is Dr. Olive, that we have not seen him?"

"He has been to Philadelphia to settle up an estate, to which he has fallen heir by the death of an uncle. He returns to-morrow, and is to give us his company occasionally, for he is a great favorite with us all. There, Madge, you nearly planted your foot on an Indian-pipe. How waxen white it is."

"It has more the appearance of a death's head. Ugh! how very white. I'm afraid to pick it, Ag."

"Don't be silly, Madge. Here, I'll pluck it. Now place it carefully in your receptacle—one treasure added to your store."

Thus they proceeded, their conversation commonplace, robbing clumps of wild-flowers of their prettiest, till they reached a felled tree, which lay upon the ground like a mighty Briarean-armed crustacean. Over their heads hung a canopy of leaves, through which the sunlight filtered and broke into a thousand tiny globules of different-hued light, birds warbled forth to their Maker their sweetest arias, and insects chirped noisily. A carpet of moss lay at their feet. The "Neighbors" was tossed aside, for in this seductive spot, no being of flesh and blood could have perused a single line, and emptying the basket of its contents, the girls were soon in the mysteries of bouquet-making, flowers strewed wildly over their laps and tumbling to their feet. Miss Lyman, being an inveterate talker, let her tongue run as usual, and as was often the case talked considerable nonsense.

"Agatha, what do you think of Mr. Hawthorne?" she asked, abruptly.

The question coming so suddenly startled the placid girl, whose fingers were toying idly with a white blossom. "Think of him! Why, nothing particularly, save as you say, he is quite companionable."

"Well, I think," slyly darting an upward glance at the girl's averted face, half-shielded by the broad sun-hat, "that grand and unapproachable, as you consider yourself, faithful to his Master's cause though he may be, he has had the audacity to fall in love with you. There," thrusting at random a cardinal bloom in amongst a nest of green, "you needn't bite my head off! I but expressed my candid opinion."

"Which you might better have kept to yourself," and Agatha rose to her feet so

hurriedly that her uncompleted bouquet fell to the ground, the "Neighbors" after it. "'Tis immaterial to me what you think."

"A-hem! Whenever was my lady aroused to such a pitch of excitement before? The snow-image has dissolved, and a creature of fire arisen from its ashes. 'The heart of Judge Hastings's daughter is galvanized at last! Hurrah! The Rector of St. Luke's has bombarded its fortress.' And in her enthusiasm the merry girl tore off her hat and flung it aloft. In its descent it lodged in the tree overhead, for which Madge cared not a picayune. "For when I get ready to go home I can stone it down, or failing in that attempt, climb the tree for it," she said. "Ag," grasping at the white dress of the tall figure standing silently there, "you aren't mad, are you? If so, 'tis an infallible sign that your feelings are touched. Re-seat yourself, I beg, and decoy the 'Neighbors' from their proximity to your nosegay, else will they purloin its choicest blossoms."

Miss Hastings obeyed, coolly remarking: "I do wish, Miss Lyman, that you would dispense with your nonsense."

"In which state I should resemble a fish on dry land. No, thank you, Miss Hastings. Seriously, Mr. Hawthorne intends, 'willy-nilly,' making you *rectoress* of St. Luke's. What an enviable lot! What will you do when he requests the honor?"

"Madge," and a stream of light seemed to issue from the girl's eyes, "if you say another word upon the subject, I'll go directly home. Mr. Hawthorne cares not a straw for so frail and unworthy a creature as myself. Even so, and he should 'request the honor,' Judge Hastings's daughter—" and Judge Hastings's daughter drew herself proudly up, a contumelious smile wreathing her clear-chiselled lips—"would most peremptorily decline!"

The crackling of a twig, the noise of a heavy footstep, and through the bushes came a man, dressed in clerical black, with hat in hand—the Rector of St. Luke's, Richard Hawthorne!

Madge gave a little cry, but pallid as Carrara marble Agatha rose and confronted him. He stepped in front of her—this fair, usually passionless girl, about whom lingered an indescribable charm—transfixing her with his dark eyes.

"Is not Judge Hastings's daughter somewhat premature in her avowal to refuse your humble servant? Will she not wait

fill the honor is solicited by him, such being the rule required by etiquette?"

Clinching her white hands passionately together, with head slightly drooping, Agatha made reply, "I am extremely sorry, Mr. Hawthorne, you overheard my unlucky retort. Madge provoked me into making it, yet, it is but just to say, I meant it when I made it. And you are the last man I should have believed guilty of eavesdropping!"

"It was by accident I overheard your remark. I had been in the depths of the wildwood, and becoming tired, found a comfortable seat and sat down to rest. Morpheus wooed me to sleep. I was awakened by Miss Lyman's 'hurrah!' and just in time it seems to prove the truth of the old saying, 'The devil is always near when talking about him.' Pray give yourself no uneasiness, Miss Hastings; the words you gave utterance to were in nowise galling to me. True, I admire you as I would any beautiful fair woman—probably because I am so dark myself. But beyond that admiration, believe me, I have no intention of going. The idea of your becoming my wife was and is simply an impossibility—that never presented itself to my mind in any form. Forget your words, and let's be friends. As rector of this parish it behooves us to be on excellent terms."

He put out his hand, but Agatha let hers hang by her side, and, speechless, regarded him. What an idiot she had been to make that remark! Why, he cared no more for her than for an image! Somehow the thought did not please her. Was the man made of stone, that her words did not sting him? or—how galling!—did he deem her a silly senseless creature, for whom to care it was foolish? "He shall see that I am indifferent as to his opinion," she said; and accordingly placed her hand in his.

"I ratify the compact, sir; we will be friends. If you are not in a hurry, sit down and glance at our treasures. Here are two bouquets we have made. Is not a little more green needed in mine to relieve the sameness?"

Thus they whiled away an hour, when, glancing at her watch, Agatha knew it was time she was at home. "Madge, we must be going. 'Tis nearly time for the train freighted with our guests to arrive. Mr. Hawthorne, your path lies in our direction, I believe?"

"It does; and if I may have the pleasure,

I will see you ladies home. Miss Lyman," with a merry twinkle in his eye, "what are you to wear on your head?"

"My hat. Wont you get it down for me, please? If not, I'll have to climb the tree for it, and I doubt my adroitness in that line."

With a quick leap he caught the branch upon which it had alighted, shook it down, and they set out for home.

"So Ferndale is to be made merry with the voices of guests, Miss Agatha?" he said, carelessly knocking off a daisy-head with a stick he picked up from the ground. "I wish you a delightful time."

"Thanks; and remember, Mr. Hawthorne, you and Dr. Clive are to give us all your leisure hours. We are to be inordinately gay, but not wicked. Twenty people are coming—a miscellaneous gathering, *en passant*; of beaux and belles, a *bas-bleu*, a Queen of Song, a poet, a distinguished divine, and last but not least, a live lord. All the old families for miles around are to render us their aid and join in the festivities. Dejeuners, botanical fetes, 'at homes,' tableaux vivants, dinner-parties, etc., interspersed with dancing of course, will follow each other in quick succession, all of which you will sanction, Mr. Hawthorne."

"That depends," decapitating with his walking-stick another white-rimmed, golden-centered daisy. "In so luminous a gathering of celebrities I would figure but sorrowfully. But here our paths diverge. Good-morning, ladies;" and with a bow the Rev. Richard Hawthorne proceeded on his way, still creating with his stick sad havoc among the daisies.

"Ah, my haughty lady," he muttered, "as I am but human, your words did nettles me to-day more than I would care to confess. But a more insuperable barrier than your pride stands in the way of our union. Walled around with icy reserve as you are, I might perhaps win you if—O my God, forgive my wickedness! Make me more humble, and a more worthy follower of him who died for all mankind." With which prayer he bent his steps homeward—a pretty parsonage of gray stone, over which English ivy clambered, attaching its tendrils here and there. Reaching it he entered, and going directly to his library, seated himself in his "sleepy hollow" by his favorite window, from where a magnificent view was visible. Some mail matter lying on the

mantel-shelf caught his eye. One long cream-tinted envelop he picked up. At sight of the superscription he trembled somewhat, then he tore it open and greedily devoured its contents. The few lines traced on the paper stunned him. Again he read them; then "God have mercy on her soul!" broke from his lips. "Help me, O Father, not to be thankful for her death."

Long, long with bowed head he sat there—not a movement on his part—not a syllable breaking from his lips—till the door opened, and an elderly woman, who superintended the work, entered, saying, "Dinner is served, sir." He rose mechanically, tore the momentous letter in fragments, threw them in the waste-basket, and went into the dining-room and partook of the viands like a person in a dream. He retired early that night, but so excited was he with the contents of that letter that only once his eyes closed in sleep, and then at his bedside, in the "waste and middle" of the night, with white wild face, from which gleamed evil eyes, with long slender fingers clutching at his throat, was the woman of whose death the letter told. "Beware, beware!" she hissed, "for I am alive, still standing between you and happiness." He started up, bathed in perspiration. Had he not read the letter aright? Was his bane—his red-lipped Lania—alive? Staringly fixed was his gaze, as Saul's must have been when looking for the just man to come forth at the beck of the Witch of Endor. Was his dream a presentiment of evil? or but a phosphorescent flash of a diseased mind? "No, she is dead," he said; "the writer of that letter was convinced." And when the morning light came, flushing the eastern horizon with red, he rose, convinced that the curse of his life was removed, and as the days wore on a newer, brighter color touched his face, the haunting look left his eyes and he was like another man.

Meanwhile at Ferndale gayety reigned supreme. Everything to promote the happiness of her guests Agatha thought of. Madge had now no cause for complaint. In a *dolce far niente* dream of pleasure she passed the hours away, her most devoted admirer, Dr. Clive. In the village physician she had met her fate. How well she remembered the first time she saw him. 'Twas at a croquet party, and, not being the centre of attraction, Miss Lyman was feeling slightly bored, when upon the scene ap-

peared a tall elegantly-formed man, with dark splendid face and laughing eyes, who to the girl listlessly swinging her mallet, seemed beautiful and good as Balder is described in the songs of the Edda, and from that moment life to her was touched with the color of rose. And to Dr. Clive this slight girl with the fallow complexion and pouting pretty mouth was the embodiment of all that is lovely, and he who had withstood the graces of Judge Hastings's fair daughter, straightway succumbed to the inferior charms of Miss Lyman and became her slave.

Since the day in the woods the ladies had not met Mr. Hawthorne, and Agatha began to think her unjust words had wounded him very much. She wondered why his non-appearance provoked her, and why she was continually comparing him with the gentlemen at Ferndale, he rising, and they falling, in her estimation by comparison. Mr. Gayworthy was tall, broad-shouldered, well-made—a young Samson in strength; Mr. Longworth a perfect Hercules, muscular and blonde, hitherto her ideal of a man; now neither suited her; neither was so manly as the rector. Still, if these thoughts had been put into words by another, she would have disclaimed at once.

She was sitting at the piano one evening, evoking from the white and black keys dreamy arpeggios of one of Mendelssohn's *Lieder*, when the gentleman occupying her thoughts came into the room. She was alone, her guests having with one exception gone on a straw ride. She had intended going with them of course, but when the time came her head was aching piteously, therefore she remained at home. It was only by her express command that they had not deferred the ride.

"No, go," she said; "I should prove but poor company to-night, and my head will feel better if I am alone." So with many words of sympathy, in a great wagon lined with straw, drawn by four strong gray horses, with evergreens ranged around, ablaze with Chinese lanterns, which glowed like yellow stars through the branches, they drove off, and Agatha was left alone. Softly she played, her white dress fluttering about her, a warm-hued Indian scarf twisted about her shoulders. She had not heard his step and was not aware of his presence till:

"Miss Agatha, have you no greeting for

me?" caused her to stay her fingers and look around. There stood Richard Hawthorne with the brightest face she had ever seen him wear, a smile actually playing about his grave lips, the haunting look no longer in his eyes. She placed her hand in his, the headache forgotten for the time.

"I am delighted that you have come. I thought you had deserted us for good."

"Nay, Miss Hastings, but I have been busy of late—no time allotted me to engage in festive scenes. Why do I find you alone, talking with the spirits?"

"A headache, superinduced by too much excitement, is the cause. You must have passed a merry load on your way."

"I did—a right jolly one—all singing vociferously. I am on a begging expedition, Miss Hastings"—changing the subject—"but if your head is troubling you, banish me from your presence."

"And punish myself, eh? Indeed I will not. My head is aching but slightly now, and I was wishing for company more lively than the spirits when I sat down to play. State your errand, please, and see if I can be of assistance. Is the church in debt? And how much do you want from me?" she asked, playfully.

He laughed. "It's not money, Miss Hastings, but your aid to procure some. You see we need a new library in the Sabbath school, or at least an addition to the old one, as many of the books are torn and defaced sadly. Some of the members plead for a fair, and as far as my knowledge goes, that seems the best way to raise the means; for, although a fair causes work, it is a harmless amusement, and may be the means of bringing together a better state of feeling among the people than is now existing. What say you? Will you assist in the work?"

"Ay, sir, heartily; and will promise to enlist the sympathy of my guests in behalf of the bazaar. I shall begin operations tomorrow, fi-h out from their hiding-places all the handsome pieces of silk, and velvet, and bits of ribbon I can find, and manufacture therefrom little articles which I shall label with an extravagant price. Already I see an extensive library of choice books resulting from our project, not bound in blue and gold like Tennyson's poems, but with good substantial leather covers to them, able to withstand the rather rough handling of the children. When is it to take place?"

She was new to him in this mood, for, though ever gracious, there was a certain chilliness in her behaviour towards him inseparable in speech and gesture. They were chatting amicably, devising plans for the success of the contemplated fair, when the doorway was darkened by a girlish shape, and the gallant repartee of the rector's to one of Miss Hastings's teasing remarks was silenced on his lips. Agatha's eyes followed his, and there in the doorway was one of her guests, Rose Clifford, who, feeling indisposed like herself, had not gone on the straw-ride. Observing that her hostess was not alone, the girl would have silently withdrawn, but Agatha called out, "Do not go, Rose. A question of much moment is on the tapis, and the more to enter in an argument upon it the better. Come, I want you."

Thus signalled the girl came forward—a slight symmetrical girl, with a walk that reminded you of a Spanish lady. An attractive, rather than a pretty face she had, with eyes like a saint's, and dark hair banded smoothly about a calm low brow. Her dress was of some thin black texture, her ornaments sardonyx cameos, elegantly carved.

"What is it, Agatha?" And the judge's daughter wondered why she had never noticed before how sweet and refined the low voice was, and how pleasing the rather colorless face.

She hastened to make the man and girl acquainted.

"Rose, this is our minister, the Rev.—"

But the gentleman cut short the sentence. "There is no necessity for an introduction, Miss Hastings. Miss Clifford and I are old friends. How happy I am to see you, Rose!"

He had both of her hands in his, regarding her with kind loving eyes; while she, with bowed head, stood silent, waves of crimson flushing her pale cheeks. To Agatha it was a love scene, and the pain in her head increased, and for the first time in her life envy and malice had a place in her heart. Now she realized by the feeling of jealousy stinging her that she loved this small puissant man, whose figure she had sneered at the first time she saw him in the pulpit. Yes, no Greek girl chained was ever more of a captive than she. And her rival, if without her splendid beauty, was such a girl as most men would admire.

How luring her face, her manner! She roused herself to be agreeable, to enact the role of hostess in her inimitable way, but the air of hauteur which distinguished the judge's daughter was resumed, and not once during the remainder of the clergyman's stay did it in the least thaw.

'Twas a mild night, the blue empyrean scattered thick with gold-eyed stars, and upon leaving the rector expressed a desire that the girls should look out and see how beautiful the evening was.

Agatha laughed, a little jarring laugh, and declined, saying, "You, Rose, favor Mr. Hawthorne with your company to the gateway. We do not stand on ceremony here in the country, and the night is certainly lovely, and Mr. Hawthorne so evidently desires your presence that it would be a pity to deprive him of it."

She wound her own black lace mantilla around the girl's head and shoulders, then bidding the rector good-night, began pacing the floor with rapid steps, her heart making fast tumultuous throbs. And out in the summer night, down a terraced walk the man led the quiet girl, halcyon stars glimmering from above. How gloriously lovely the scene, made radiant by the combined light of moon and stars! But neither detected the beauty. "Rose," and the man's voice was husky with emotion, "have you heard? Do you know that Estelle is dead?"

He expected her to draw away from him in amazement; instead she said, quietly enough, "I read of her death in the Times. Poor cousin Stella! Forgive me, but guilty as she was, wretched as she has made your life and my own, I am sorry for her. When and how did you receive the news, Richard?"

"A week or so ago, and by letter. A railroad collision, the letter ran, and among the names of those killed my wife's and her guilty paramour, Raymond——"

"O hush! Richard," clutching hold of his arm with all her strength, "for God's sake do not mention his name! Three years have gone by since I nearly lost all faith in mankind, but I never hear his name that it does not pain me—pain me terribly. I loved him—loved him so!"

Such a world of misery in her voice, in the eyes uplifted to his. How he pitied her! And to the judge's daughter in the bay-window they were rehearsing vows of undying love.

III.

'Twas the day of the fair. In a grove, with the ground cleared from all obstructions, made smooth for the occasion, various departments were made, over which various girls were stationed; above, no covering save the branches of primeval trees. Fancy articles of all kinds were here displayed. Cakes, candies, nuts and cream—all sorts of confectionery in fact—were sold. In a prettily constructed hut of hemlock, Judge Hastings's daughter reigned. Here was the centre of attraction. From morning, till now late in the afternoon, Agatha had stood dispensing smiles, while exacting exorbitant prices for the pretty valueless articles ranged artistically about her. Gay colors met the eye on every side, and for the first time the villagers beheld Miss Hastings fantastically arrayed. Around her form fell folds of black, shot with gleams of yellow, that made one think of flame as she moved; wound about her shoulders and waist, all glowing with warmth, was a scarf woven of gold and crimson threads; and through her blonde tresses a zigzag line of Indian opal ran. On either arm gleamed a bracelet of precious stones. Like some fair Eastern queen she looked. Opposite in a hut similarly built Rose Clifford presided, and a little beyond Madge and the doctor kept an eating-house. The fair was proving a great success; and so the rector said to himself as he halted in front of Agatha's domicile.

"What can I show you, sir?" she asked, in her most business-like way. "We have quantities of slippers, radiant with all the hues of the rainbow. No, you do not care to look at any? Perhaps are already supplied. Perchance you might fancy a clerical white necktie, or a bookmark, or a centennial badge, or——"

He shook his head. "You are a famous clerk, Miss Agatha, but you can't entice me further. I have made way with all my spare change. You look tired. Let Miss Olman auctioneer in your stead for a while, and come and rest yourself on a rock by the side of a stream that I have found. I have a story to tell you."

Tremblingly she obeyed. Was he going to announce his love for Rose? White and cold in spite of the warm colors in which she was clothed, grew her face. Yet she took his proffered arm, and walked quietly by his side till the rock was reached. He

seated her, his face grave almost to sadness, but Agatha was not looking at it; away from the aisles of green her eyes were wandering.

"Agatha, can you guess why I have brought you here?"

Still she kept her eyes averted, but softly answered, "Yes. It is to tell me you are engaged to Rose Clifford. I congratulate you. She is a prize."

He rose and stood before her. "You know it is not so. You may call me presumptuous, and tell me there is no hope, but I love you—love you, girl, in spite of the stinging words you uttered that day in the woods."

"Do not speak of them," she cried. "I have been punished severely, for that day I lost my heart—gave it to you. But I thought it was Rose you cared for."

He did not kiss her, did not take her in his arms as an ardent lover might, but by her side he again seated himself, and began: "Agatha, ere I ask you to be my wife, I have a story whose pages I must unfold to you. I am a widower. Nay, do not start. You are my first and only love. Let me give you the outlines. Five years ago, when I was a mere boy, I married Estelle Kling. Why, you would inquire, when for her I had no love. It was to please my mother, who on her deathbed exacted of me the promise to make Estelle my wife. She loved me, mother said. Afterward, when I had fulfilled the promise, I made a little discovery. Estelle married me for my fortune, which was and is immense. So you see, darling, in the eyes of the world, I am not a nobody, after all.

"Two years went by, and one night when the earth was wrapped in white, and the wind blew bitterly, she eloped with a man, who to me had ever been the embodiment of goodness—Raymond Cross, and Rose's affianced husband. Poor Rose! To this day the mentioning of his name causes her to shudder and turn white. I was educated for the ministry, and although by nature I am very faulty and wicked, I have striven my best to save souls and bring them to their Maker. I have not toiled in vain. As far as Estelle is concerned, I treated her with all due respect and tenderness, and was only to blame for marrying her without love. I can only plead in extenuation of my fault my extreme youth. A divorce I did not seek. 'Whom God hath joined

together let no man put asunder,' rang in my ears and prevented. A short time ago there was a smashup on the railroad, and the two who had eloped that winter's night met their death. My life has not been devoid of torture, for I am sensitive, and proud in my way as you, and the name of Hawthorne, an old one, was never before disgraced. But when I met you, so fair, so lovable, my lot grew like unto that of Tantalus—almost unbearable. I loved you, but knew that that love could only bring misery to me. I meant to have kept the secret hidden for months yet, but something, over which I had no control, urged me to try my fate to-day. Now, darling, knowing all, sometime in the future will you be my wife? I have wealth at my command, and with it we can do much good."

He extended his arms, and like a tired child she entered them, the brook babbling gleefully at their feet, his kisses falling thick and fast upon her lips. And just beyond, with wicked eyes peering through a thicket of weeds in which she was hidden, was a lost abandoned woman, who had overheard the recital of love. She clinched her hands until the finger-nails brought blood, her face demoniacal in its rage. 'Twas none other than Estelle, the wife he believed dead. Wretched, without money and friends, wholly destitute, she had sought out her husband—for what she scarcely knew herself. She must have money or starve. She had been on the cars when the accident happened, true, and although scarred, robbed of her good looks, life had not been taken from her. Night and day she had travelled, on the cars or on foot, hungry and weary till Ashwood was reached. Going to the parsonage, she found the rector absent; at the fair, she had been told, and, tired and footsore as she was, she kept on till she came to the grove, peering through the groups of people in search of the one she had treated so shamefully. At last, in company with a tall fair girl, whose hair seemed to catch and imprison in its meshes gleams of the yellow sunshine sifting through the trees, she saw him, slowly moving off in the direction where the trees were larger and thicker, and the shadows blacker and more dense. Taking a circuitous path to avoid all prying eyes, she followed and came near them, where she could distinctly catch the words said. They angered her—this shameless woman, who had allied her-

self to the rector, merely for the purpose of luxuriating in his riches. But, weak and foolish, she had listened to the guilty love a cowardly man had whispered in her ear, and for the sake of his handsome face and foppish manner left her attractive home and noble husband; now, she had fallen as low as a being could and live. With beauty and character gone, abandoned by the wretch who had lured her from her home but to destroy her, moneyless, and tired almost to death, with her bosom writhing with passions that burned her as destroying flames, hating herself, the world, and all it contained, she lay upon the ground, planning in some way to ruin the happiness of the man she had wronged and the girl he loved. How beautiful the girl was! more beautiful than she had been in her palmiest days. How innocent! She could have strangled her with those white slender hands, from which the blood caused by the imprints of her finger-nails came. How she hated him—her—everybody! How happy they were, while she—O heavens, how miserable she was!

"In all the world there is not a more wretched creature than I," she moaned; "the sunlight falls not on one more unhappy or guilty. Curse the man who enticed me from virtue with his devilish wiles! But for him I might be rolling in wealth, a happy wife. O curse him! curse him, I say!"

Then as she saw the two so lately betrothed walking away, her hand resting lightly on his arm, she gathered together all her faculties, sat upright and pondered. What was to be done? "He shall support me at least," she muttered; "otherwise I will blazon the fact of my being his wife to the world. What excitement it will create! A minister of God allied to a woman of shameful reputation. How like combustible material the words will take fire and spread, till the whole of his holy congregation is convulsed with horror. To keep secret his shame he will willingly close my mouth with a shower of gold. Bah! how weak I've been. I'll drag my weary limbs back to the parsonage and wait till its master comes."

The day closed, night shadows fell around, and under the globes of light flashing here and there amidst the trees, the proceeds of the bazaar were summed up—\$80.00 in all. The getters-up clapped their hands in joy;

the result exceeded their expectations amazingly. They would not only have an addition to their dilapidated library, but a few little trifles to embellish the church. Besides, they had had an enjoyable time, gossiped to their hearts' content, and flirted not a little. Madge voted it a blissful day, to which the doctor assented, as he gave her his arm, and escorted her through the clover-scented meadow home, lingering long on the way, and long at the door, as if loath to leave her; and when he did, leaving her with a face suffused with blushes, with lovelight in her eyes. He had proposed and been accepted. Happy Madge!

And another couple, Agatha and the minister, had lingered on the way, too, so long that the shabby object on the parsonage steps had fallen asleep, and there she lay with the moonlight falling on her face and disclosing her features, when a man's step, light and springy, touched the pavement, and his curious glance fell on the figure of rags at his feet. The Lord have mercy! It was Estelle—alive, not dead as he had believed. The walls of his *Chateau en Espagne* tumbled to his feet; his glowing dream had evaporated—broken as the bubbles he had blown in his childhood, only to break when at their brightest. Was she waiting for him? He roused her with his foot. "Woman," he said, in a voice so strange he knew it not, "what are you doing here? Get up."

She sprang upright, her dishevelled hair tumbling about her scarred face, looking in the pale moonlight that she was—a lost creature. A shudder ran through him; she was so repulsive. How different from the refined girl he had just parted with.

He pushed off the hand she laid on his arm impatiently. With one cry to the good God above, he stifled the impulse to strangle her; and as the uplifted hand fell powerless downward, the cunning tempters of evil thronging in his soul took their departure.

"Come in my study, out of sight of passers-by, and tell me why you are here. Have you risen from the dead to mock me? Were you not killed when the accident took place at —? I read your name among the list."

"Don't be a fool, Richard. I am alive, a being of blood and flesh, as you will acknowledge if you but lay your hand upon me. Ah! you shrink, as if the touch would

contaminate you. You are right. I am a spirit of darkness, about whom lingers not a trace of good. How comfortable!" as she sank into an easy-chair, under the full blaze of the gilded chandelier, her eye taking in all the pretty details of the room, with its carpet strewn with autumn leaflets, its many choice books scattered here and there, its articles of vertu, the marble Clytie in the bow-window, and the painting on the wall, of Christ on the cross, after Murillo. "I was a doll to leave you in those happy days, Richard. But repentance availeth not; it cometh too late. You would not take me back, I suppose?"

"Never, creature of shame!" he cried. "You are less to me than the dust beneath my feet. You gave up a home of luxury, a husband who sought to make your every want satisfied, to become the mistress of a man who was the betrothed of your cousin. Poor Rose! how much she has suffered by the dastardly act, God and her own heart alone know. Now tell me your errand, and begone, and never, never let me see your face again! The sight of it stirs up a feeling within me like unto that which Cain must have felt when he became a murderer. I am not proof against it, minister though I be."

He began to pace the floor, his face white with anguish, the woman's chatoyant eyes gleaming catlike in the dark, an ugly leer about her mouth. In front of the painting he stopped, fastening his glance upon it as if appealing for help. 'Twas full of wonder. The background was so dark that it might be termed black, and out in full relief stood the cross upon which our Saviour was nailed, the blood crimsoning his torn hands and feet, a crown of thorns piercing his godlike brow. And the face! 'Twas the face of a Christ—for no mortal man's face surely ever looked like that. Sublime in its agony, beautiful in its sorrow. Ah, the touching tender face! Looking at it there came a revulsion of feeling, and, strong man as he was, he bowed his head and wept, wept so bitterly that she who was the cause of it all grew frightened.

"Richard," she said, "sit down and compose yourself, and I will at once make known my errand. I want money—a pile of it. If you will give it to me I will leave your presence forever. What do you say?"

The tempest of grief overwhelming him was subdued, and standing before her, he

said, "Estelle, you shall not want. I will give you a roll of bills now enough to last for the present, and if you will depart quietly, and not let the fact of your being my wife be made known in this neighborhood, where I am doing some good, I will from time to time forward you money, so that you cannot only live comfortably but expensively. Those who were acquainted with our marriage believe you dead. Let them still think so. Otherwise not one penny shall you have, and I will at once obtain a divorce."

"To get married again?" she sneered.

He silenced her with a look. "Nay, so long as you live, I have no right to do so. I shall not marry."

"You hope I'll die, don't you?" she leered.

"God forbid! Not till you have in part atoned for your sin by repenting. The Giver of Life will not turn to you a deaf ear. O Estelle—"

She stopped him with a laugh. "Don't preach, Richard. Give me the money and I will begone. In future you can send your allowance—mind, let it be a princely one—to me at —, where I shall reside under the assumed name of Grey—relict of the late Edward Grey, M.D. I shall be first and foremost in the cause of religion—the one great woman of the town—looked up to by all, worshipped by the poor. Ha! ha!"

He tendered her a roll of bills. "Go, and God have mercy upon you."

She made him a mocking courtesy, and went out in the night, while he fell upon his knees before the painting and prayed.

Estelle went at once to a clothing store, purchased some wearing apparel, then hired a vehicle to convey her to a small hotel on the outskirts of the town, where she procured lodging for the night. After a hearty supper, washed down with a tumbler of rum, she threw herself on the bed, and slept till the light of morning stole in through the window. 'Twas a stifling day, barely a breath of air stirring. A thunder storm was brewing. But this did not deter Estelle from making the journey she had determined upon whilst busy with her toilet.

"I must stand face to face with my rival," she said; "talk to her; maybe break my promise to Richard, and tell her I am the wife of the man she loves. Ugh! wont she shrink from me! But how am I to arrange

it? O," after a moment's hesitation, "I have it. I used to be great on telling fortunes, hence I will adopt the role of fortune-teller, and peer into the future for my lady. Now to make myself look as much like one as possible. My hair I'll allow to straggle over my back, a crimson ribbon to ripple through it. The red scarf I purchased last night must be wound about my shoulders, gipsy fashion; my black dress is just the thing. Yes, I shall look quite fantastic. I have an old pack of cards with me, and, and—but pshaw! I'll wager but that an interview will be granted me. How like greedy cormorants the clouds gather in the heavens; the storm'll soon be upon us. However, it argues not ill for my efforts. In a storm, the elements at war with each other, my words will produce a more decided effect. I guess I'll sally out."

She did so, and walked so rapidly that she reached Ferndale ere the storm broke. As she ascended the steps the rain came down, the wind sobbed, the lightning ran like fiery serpents through the sky. Some ladies sat on the piazza watching the heavens, the judge's daughter among them.

"What will you have, woman?" she asked, an indefinable thrill of terror creeping over her, as if she knew the words about to be uttered would blast her young life.

"I am Myra, the gipsy, lady, whose province it is to unveil to mortals the hidden future. If desired, can unearth strange secrets belonging to the past. Let me see what fate holds in store for you, pretty one," assuming a wheedling tone.

Agatha drew back haughtily. "If I had any faith in your necromantic powers, woman, I should not care to pry into the secrets hidden from human sight."

But the others gathered around the pariah with curious faces.

"Yes, let's have our fortunes told. Who will be the first?"

"I," cried a merry blue-eyed lass. "Proceed, Hag of Evil. I will cross your hand with silver, else you do not see aright."

"Agreed, my pretty, but it must not be before so many people. If you elect, I will let you have a companion—only one."

"All right. Can we have a room, Agatha?"

"Certainly, go in the library."

Fifteen minutes elapsed, and the girls who went in came out with startled faces.

"She is the most wonderful woman,

Agatha. She read our histories as if from the printed pages of a book."

This excited the rest to such a pitch that they followed suit, two by two, until all gathered on the piazza but Agatha had had their fortunes told either by cards or by the lines in the human hand. Obeying an impulse, Agatha decided to go. She went and found Rose, and together they entered the room. In a chair before a table, on which were scattered the cards, the supposed gipsy sat. But at sight of her Rose Clifford grew faint and leaned heavily on Agatha for support. "What is it, Rose?"

Ere the girl could reply, if she had intended to, Estelle had risen and come towards them. "Rose Clifford, is it possible! You here?"

"It is I, Estelle. But you—we heard you were dead."

"So Richard told me. But you see me before you, alive. Wilt have thy fortune told?"

"There is nothing to tell," the girl replied, drearily. "The future stretches before me a dreary waste, where flowers do not blossom, where the sun shines not. My life is ended, so far as hope and happiness are concerned. In the dead gray ashes of the past my heart is buried."

"If so, I can but stir the gray ashes and the dead heart will throb anew with life. Do not look so pitiful. For the sake of the years dead and gone, Rose, when you loved me, I am about to right a wrong. Be prepared for joyful news. Do not faint. The man who lured me from my husband was not Raymond Cross, as you had every reason to believe, but Captain Travers, a dissolute coxcomb. He was crushed to death when the railroad accident occurred which robbed me of my beauty. Curse him! There," as Rose sank to the floor, "she has fainted! Why can't one hear glad tidings without swooning?"

Agatha heard not; the woman's words struck her dumb, speechless; she realized that the rector of St. Luke's was as dead to her as if clothed in cerements, and deposited in a sepulchre.

Rose, who had not fainted, started up, white and trembling, hope mingling with unbelief in her glance. "Say it again, Estelle, O, say it again! Did Raymond Cross not accompany you that night? Then why did you leave that fatal letter behind, so mischievous in its nature, which caused a world of harm?"

"Why? Because that black-hearted villain Travers convinced me that a fortune devolved upon my so doing. His grandfather was on the verge of death, and he did not want him to learn the fact, for fear he might alter his will. Then, too, he had conceived for Raymond a deadly hatred."

"And I—O my God! how I have wronged him—my Raymond, so true, so noble! O Father, forgive me the wrong I am guilty of! When he wrote me and prayed for a hearing, I denied him!"

Agatha threw her arms around the pale girl's neck and kissed her. "It will all come right in the end, Rose. He will forgive, and a reconciliation will be effected."

The faltering tones, the touch of the soft arms about her neck, caused Rose to try and assuage her own grief and comfort the girl in whose path no light shone—where nothing but clouds lurked overhead. "O Agatha, how I pity you!"

"Hush, Rose. Words are of no effect now, however sympathetic. I must bear my sorrow as best I may. That woman shall not gloat over my downfall. No one shall suspect, no one know. And Richard! tied to yon hag, with the evil face and lax manners! And he so refined! But she must depart; the same roof cannot cover us."

With haughty step and calm face, with nothing about her to indicate the grief that was gnawing at her vitals, and torturing her, Agatha crossed over to the window where Richard's wife stood, with eyes fixed on the blackened heavens.

"Woman, your errand is accomplished. Begone! Delay a moment, and I will have you ejected by the servants."

"You will, eh?" And the woman turned upon the speaker with the rage of an infuriated beast. "If so, 'twill be at your peril and the peril of the man you love. 'Twould

have been better not to have threatened, for now, come weal, come woe, though I forfeit untold gold by speaking, I will proclaim to all Ashwood the secret their beloved pastor is hiding from them. I go to make it known to the winds of heaven."

She started for the door, but Rose intercepted her. "O Estelle, be generous. Richard is all that is kind and good, and by you he has suffered grievously. Forbear!"

But Estelle pushed the slight girl out of her path. "I cannot forgive. I go to make good my threat." Out of the room she stalked, into the open air, the wind still sobbing, the rain still falling, the lightning flashing in the sky. Drenched to the skin, she minded not; she was too intent upon humbling the proud girl by exposing Richard Hawthorne's secret. Alas! 'twas never told. Even as she was rehearsing it to herself—cursing Agatha in her heart—as if God meant to thwart her in her plan, there came a flash of lightning so vividly bright that the world seemed on fire—a flash which the woman did not see; for the same flash that shivered in splinters a tall tree, bereft her of life. Late in the day she was found; the next day buried. On the hillside, where a willow bent its tresses, where the birds sang, and the strawberries grew, she was laid to rest. A simple white stone marked her grave. Upon it the word "Estelle"—nothing more. This was done by Richard, through Rose, who said she had known her in life. And none but those she had wronged ever knew that in that grave the wife of Richard Hawthorne slept.

The months rolled on—twelve in number; and then an event happened in Ashwood of a pleasing nature. 'Twas this: in the gothic church of St. Luke's, three couples married at once. "Who? who?" you ask. Nay, if you cannot guess, I shall not tell you.

THE STOLEN CHILD.

BY MRS. CAROLINE ORNE.

"I'm cold, Archie," said a little child; and going up to a boy crouching by a small, rusty stove, she cuddled down close by his side.

"Well, I can't help it, sis," said the boy. "There is n't a chip or coal left;" but he opened the stove door, blew off the white ashes which had gathered over the dying embers, and placed the child so that she could feel the faint warmth they emitted. It was very sad to see how eagerly she thrust forward her small hands, purple with cold, so as to catch what little heat there was. In a minute or two, a noise was heard outside the door, as if some one was fumbling with the latch.

"There, sis, he is comin' now, and you 'll be in his way;" and, snatching up the unresisting child, into whose large, brown eyes came a sudden fear, he placed her on a pile of straw, in one corner of the damp cellar-room, hastily threw over her a tattered quilt, and then ran and opened the door.

"Why did n't you let me in, and not keep me out in the cold all night?" said the

man, who, with marks of moral degradation stamped on his face, and those of physical destitution exhibited in his soiled, threadbare garments, seemed eager for some cause of complaint.

"I thought the door was unfastened, so you could open it yourself."

"You did n't think any such thing. What did you let the fire go out for?" he then angrily demanded.

"'Cause fire al'ays goes out when there 's nothin' to burn."

"What 's become of the coal and chips you picked yesterday? But I need n't ask. You wasted it all to keep that little imp in yonder corner warm. See that you don't do it again, for, when I come home, I must and will have a fire. We must get rid of the young 'un somehow, and if you don't do it, I will."

"You stole her, sir, and now I think you ought to take care of her."

"How dare you say that I stole her?"

"'Cause you did."

"How do you know?"

"I heard mother say you did."

"When?"

"Only a few days afore she died."

"Is that all she told you about it?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe you. When a woman begins to tell anything, she never breaks off so short as that. When her tongue begins to go, it keeps runnin', till she gets to the end of the worsted. Come, now, — own up, and tell me what more she said about the little imp."

"She did n't say anything more. I guess she meant to, but she heard you comin', so she did n't dare to."

"It's lucky for you, and the child, too, that she did n't. If she had — Well, no matter. She did n't dare to, as you say. Mag had a will of her own, but it had to come under. I broke it down."

"You broke her heart, sir, — that's very certain."

"You're your mother's own child, — a little too peart to suit me. I was a fool for marryin' a widdier with a great awkward boy to feed and clothe. But I'll get rid of that three-year-old, and then you'll have time to do somethin' else besides takin' keer of her."

"If she goes away, I sha'n't stay," was the thought that passed through Archie's mind; but he was too shrewd to give it expression.

"If she could only be made to answer the purpose I meant she should," resumed the man, "she might stay. She's real handsome, — there's no denyin' that, — and Mag used to have a sight giv'n her for the sake of her purty child; and you, if you were sharp and cunning, as some boys are, could take her round with you, pass her off for your sister, and get heaps of cakes and other dainties to feed her with, and us, too."

"Maybe I'll try tomorrow, and see 'f I can. I wish you'd tell me where she come from."

"That's what I'll never do. But I'll tell you this much: The child's father is so rich that he can set and loll in a cheer kivered with welwet, while I've nothin' better 'n a three-legged stool to set on. He can walk on floors kivered with carpets that look as if flowers were bloomin' all over 'em, while I have to put up with a rough, dirty floor, full of damp and mildew. More than that, he can every day sit down to a

table spread with all kinds of meats, ples, and sparklin' wines, while I have to gnaw a mouldy crust, and wash it down with water, — or, at best, what the Injuns call fire-water, — jest as if he was made of better flesh and blood than I am. I can remember the time when he had n't as much money as I had."

"Not as much as you?" asked Archie, with a look of astonishment.

"No, not a quarter part as much."

"How came he to get so ahead of you, then?"

"'Cause fate would have it so."

"Mother used to tell me that people sometimes make their own fate. She said she made hers when she married you, and a bad one it was."

"As well call it fate as anything. I s'pose people in gineral said 't was all owin' to his havin' a better eddication than I had. I don't know but 't was. You see, at first, his larnin' was n't better 'n mine, but instead of spendin' his airnin' in fine clothes, oyster suppers, and sech like, as I did, — for I could n't bear to be outdone in that way, — he spent 'em goin' to an evenin' school, where, besides writin' and cipherin', which I was a tol'able hand at myself, he larnt grainmar, and 'strology, I believe they called it, — it had ology to it, at any rate, — and sech kind of trash, with the black art into the bargain, as I raly b'leve, for the very gal I had in my eye, who was the only darter of a man rich as a Jew, took him, and would n't have anything to say to me, for all that I beat him all holler in good looks and fine clothes, as everybody said. Some thought my refusin' to sign the temperance pledge had somethin' to do with her refusin' me; but if she was rich and handsome, I was n't goin' to be snubbed in that way, as long as I lived in a free country. But I don't care. For a year past, I've bin takin' my revenge, and calc'late to go on takin' it. I reckon he and his wife don't take much more comfort with their fine house and furniture, rich dinners, and splendid kerridge and horses, since they lost their child, than I do, poor as I am. What is there for my supper?"

"Some bread, the same as Margy and I had, — that's all."

"If there's nothin' better 'n that, I'll go without."

Archie slept but little that night. His step-father's threat, relative to little Margy,

continually haunted him, even in his dreams. Knowing that he was cruel, revengeful, unforgiving and unscrupulous, he even had fears for her life, unless she could be made to answer the purpose she did while his mother was alive. After devising many expedients, he finally rejected them all, as impracticable, saying to himself that he would trust to chance.

After the first faint gleam of morning light struggled through the begrimed window, the time that intervened before his step-father woke seemed to him half a day. Little Margy still slept, and Archie remained quiet, hoping that his step-father, when he rose, would go away without saying anything to him, or taking any notice of the child. But the moment he woke, he said, —

"Get up, Arch, and stir round. If you expect me to find coal and wood for a fire, to keep you in your laziness, you're mistaken."

"I don't expect you'll find it, — I'll get it myself."

"It's well you don't. If you did, you'd be disappointed."

He then went to the corner of the room where little Margy was lying, turned down the quilt, and looked at her. Archie trembled, and involuntarily held on the back of an old chair, as if to prevent springing forward to her rescue, for he expected his step-father was going to take her away with him, for the purpose, as he had threatened, of getting rid of her. He without doubt thought of it, for he murmured to himself, —

"Better wait till night, now, — I ought to have been earlier. Arch," he then said, turning to the boy, "give me some money. I have n't a red cent left, to buy my breakfast with."

"There 's all I have, sir," said Archie, handing him a little a gentleman gave him for doing an errand.

Pocketing the money, he went to the door, put his hand on the latch, then turned and looked toward the corner where lay the sleeping child. Archie again trembled, but he turned away without speaking, and left the house. While he is making his way to a cellar, where he can obtain beer and a mutton-chop for breakfast, with the money he demanded of Archie, we will enter one of the brown-stone palaces of New York city, owned by a gentleman by the name of Wilton. In an apartment, where

the keen, frosty air of that January morning was tempered to a grateful, summer warmth, Mrs. Wilton sat at the head of the breakfast-table, before the massive, richly chased silver urn, whence escaped the delicious aroma of the choice Mocha coffee, as she filled a cup of costly china for her husband, who sat opposite her. Only they two were at the table, and though Mr. Wilton took the offered cup and tasted it, he did not heed the fine mellowness of flavor, to which, like wine, by subtle and sure processes, the coffee berry is said to ripen by age. Had the beverage been made of peas or beans, it would have been all the same to him. Mrs. Wilton did not even taste her coffee, and her husband saw that it was by a great effort that she held back the tears from her eyes. She attempted to speak, but her poor, trembling, broken voice could not give utterance to her thoughts.

"Yes, I know what you are thinking about," said her husband; and then, though

"His voice swayed like an Alpine plank,
That feels a passionate torrent underneath,"

he succeeded in saying, "*It is the anniversary of the day we lost our dear Lillia.*"

"If she had only died," said Mrs. Wilton, after she had swept away with her bitter tears somewhat of the deep anguish and agitation which shook, and threatened to prostrate her.

"It would have been better," said Mr. Wilton.

"Yes, — heaven would seem so near us, if we knew that she was there. I often think, when sitting alone in the dim twilight, that if her home was there, I should sometimes get so near her in spirit as to catch glimpses of the glory by which she is surrounded. But, even in my dreams, I never see her thus. She is always a little vagrant, with no home, no shelter, except some dark, noisome den, like those from which you and I, for years, have been trying to rescue children of the degraded poor. Even should I meet her in the street, I sometimes feel afraid I should n't know her. Look at this;" and Mrs. Wilton handed the miniature of a child to her husband, and moved her chair to the side of his.

With emotions of unspeakable tenderness, they gazed on the little face, full of sunny sweetness, and of a glad, joyous look, which might have been likened to the fresh, rosy light of a summer morning.

Meantime, a keen, northwest wind was blowing without, directly in the eye of which, walking rapidly, was a boy of ten years old, with a little girl in his arms. As he went, he kept continually casting around quick, stealthy glances, as if afraid that some one was either pursuing, or lying in wait for them. His clothes were clean, yet not whole, though many a patch set awry showed his own undexterous attempts at needle-craft, that he might appear decent.

"Sissy cold, Archie," said a little plaintive voice.

"Yes, I know poor little sis is cold. There, lean down on Archie's shoulder, so the sharp, bitter wind won't bite her face;" and he attempted to place his arms around her in such a manner as to better shield her from the cold.

Just at that moment, a sharp gust of wind swept by, piercing him to the marrow with its icy breath, and, sweeping the loose dirt from the pavement, it whirled it aloft, and drove it in a dense, blinding cloud into his face. He bent down till its fury was spent, then cast a wishful look at the row of stately houses, which, as it seemed to him, were regarding him with a proud, forbidding look. There was no poor, humble-looking place in sight, that he could creep into long enough to warm "Sissy," and his own bare feet and hands were growing numb with cold. Arming himself with sudden courage, he went boldly up the steps of one of the brown-stone palaces, and rang the door-bell."

"What do you want *here*?" demanded the porter.

"To warm sis, — I 'm afraid she 'll freeze to death."

"Well, go somewhere else and warm her. The family are at breakfast, and don't wish to be disturbed."

"I won't go anywhere else. She 'll die afore I get there, if I try to go;" and resolutely crowding by the indignant porter, and following the sound of voices, and the pleasant savor of choice viands wafted from the breakfast-table, he soon stood in the presence of the master and mistress of the mansion, and their three children, a son and two daughters. Speaking to no one, Archie went directly to the open grate, where the fire burnt with a clear, ruddy glow.

"Do you know whose house you 're in?" said the gentleman, laying down his knife

and fork, and looking at Archie, with astonishment depicted in every line of his countenance.

"No," he replied.

"Well, sirrah, you are in Mr. Burder's house; and you 're a bold, brazen boy to rush by the porter, as I know you did, — for he 's had his orders about such things, — and to come in and disturb me and my family when at breakfast. It 's unpleasant to us, — *very* unpleasant."

"Well, I did n't come in for the sake of myself, 'cause it is n't any matter about me; but I could n't bear to have little sis freeze."

Archie had already seated little Margy on a velvet-covered footstool, near the fire. He now knelt by her side, and by chafing her little purple hands, tried at the same time to get warmth into them, and by producing a free circulation of the blood, prevent them from aching. He even felt proud when the glow and pleasant heat of the fire brought color to her cheeks, light to her brown eyes, and made her hair, which, with infinite care and pains he had brushed that morning, shine like burnished gold, as it clustered in soft curls round her white, blue-veined forehead.

Her dress, which was of good material, she had nearly outgrown, and in many places it was so worn that numerous tags and fringes hung to it, which were neither useful nor ornamental. On her feet were a tiny pair of kid shoes, with the gloss rubbed off, and one of them torn at the heel. But over the rest of her clothing was a blanket beautifully embroidered, which Archie had so arranged as to cover the greater part of the rags and rents. The blanket was nearly new, and unsoiled, his mother having always kept it hidden away in a box, carefully locked. His step-father had in all probability forgotten it, and as he left his miserable home with a firm determination of never returning, he wrapped it round her, not only as a protection against the cold, but with the hope that an article of clothing so fine and handsome, by heightening her beauty, might prove a kind of passport to the favor of ladies fond of children, whose charity he might ask in her behalf.

This was one of the many tentacles which, from time to time, he sought to throw out, and which were gradually revealed to his perception — perhaps instinct is the better word — sharpened to an almost preter-

natural keenness, by the constant, relentless pressure of want. A furtive glance cast now and then toward Mrs. Burder told Archie that she had discovered that Margy was a pretty child, if Mr. Burder had not. Some question, he felt certain, she was about to ask, and it soon came.

"What is your name?"

"Archie Linn."

"What is the child's name?"

"Margy."

"She has another name besides Margy, has n't she?"

"I s'pose she has."

"Well, what is it? I should like to know."

"I don't know myself, so I can't tell you."

"Whose child is she? Whom does she belong to?"

"She belongs to me, now; 'cause since mother died, there's nobody else to take care of her."

"She is n't your sister?"

"No; but I al'ays call her sis."

Mr. Burder's patience was by this time exhausted.

"I am surprised, Mrs. Burder," said he, "that you should be at the trouble of questioning one of the cunning little vagabonds that now-a-days overflow the dirty lanes and loathsome alleys, where they belong, and like swarms of vile, pestilent insects infest the more decent, even opulent, parts of the city, where families of wealth and rank might hope to be exempt."

"The child is really pretty, let her come from ever so mean a place," replied the lady.

"And what a beautiful blanket she has round her," said Laura, the eldest daughter.

"A black mark against the boy," said Mr. Burder. "It was stolen; no doubt. 'Come," said he, turning to Archie, "you've been here long enough to warm yourself, and the child, too,—so up with you, and be on the tramp."

"Sis wants some beckfas', Archie," said Margy, looking wistfully toward a plate of warm biscuit.

"I have n't the least doubt but that she's had half a dozen breakfasts already, this morning," said Mr. Burder.

"Well, never mind," said his wife, "it won't take long for her to eat a biscuit," and she handed one to the delighted child,

who commenced eating it, with an appetite made keen by the cold, sharp air.

Mrs. Burder offered one to Archie.

"No," said he. "I made my breakfast on a mouldy crust, such as beggars ought to eat, and be thankful for, and I'm sorry sis could n't have done the same; but she don't know about sech things. She don't know why that little gal at the table ought to have better bread than she has."

Could he have put what he thought and felt into words, there would have been as much keen irony in what he said, as is expressed in the following:

"We are of one flesh, after all,
And need one flannel—with a *proper sense*
Of difference in their quality."

Margy soon finished her biscuit, when Laura held a cup of milk to her lips, which she eagerly drank.

"That's dood," said she, when she had drained the milk to the last drop. And she looked up to Laura, as she spoke, with eyes beaming with a warm, sunny light.

Laura touched the child's soft, bright curls with her lips, with an impulse she could not control, for which she received a frown from her watchful father.

"Now, sis, we must go," said Archie.

"Sis don't want to go,—it's pretty here."

"She must,—sis must. Don't cry," and, wiping away the tears that started to her eyes, he carefully wrapped her in the blanket, took her in his arms, and left the room.

Mr. Burder hastened to open the door, which Archie closed when he went out, to see, as he said, that the beggars did n't loiter by the way, and steal something which might be lying round. When they were fairly out of the house, he put on his warm overcoat, and other articles of clothing impervious to the wintry air, and proceeded to his place of business. Archie stood a few moments on the door-steps, and looked wistfully up and down the broad street. There was nothing to be seen, but cold, stately magnificence.

"You'll freeze, if we stay round here, sis," said he. "We must go back to some poor place, where they'll let you stay. Let me think where it's best to go."

He walked along slowly and thoughtfully, for a little while; then, with a resolute air, as if he had made up his mind, he started

off in a direction which would soonest lead to the "poor place" he had in view. The wind was not in his face now, so, with little Margy's face nestling on his shoulder, and his arms clasped firmly around her to keep her warm, he could walk rapidly. He did not slack his speed, till he arrived at the door of a large, mean-looking tenement building, in a dark, dreary alley. Many families lived in the house, but it was a poor widow, the occupant of a garret-room, that Archie wished to see.

"Her little girl is dead," he said to himself, "so she'll think of her, I reckon, when she sees sis, and be glad to see her."

He found her hard at work, making shirts with stitched bosoms, at the munificent price of seventy-five cents per dozen.

"Good-morning, Archie," she said. "And who have you there?"

"Oh, this is sis, that I told you about t'other day."

"The little dear. Her curly head makes me think of my Susy that's dead and gone," and rising, she placed a child's chair close to the small stove.

"Oh," said Archie, as he put her in the chair, "one of her shoes is gone. I'm sorry, for I don't know when I shall get money enough to buy her another pair."

"I'm sorry, too, and wish I could help you to buy some more. I don't know but the child will be cold, for I've only a handful of coals I went out and picked early this mornin', 'fore I could see to sew, but there's enough to warm the room some."

"Let me have the basket, and I'll go and pick some for you. I know where the good places are. You'll let sis stay with you while I'm gone, won't you?"

"Yes, indeed, and be glad to have her. Here, give her this doll to play with," taking a little cheap one from a piece of tissue paper, in which it was carefully folded. "I set up late one night, just before Christmas, on purpose to earn an extra sixpence to buy it with, for Susy had heard about Santa Claus, and thought if she was good, he'd certainly give her somethin' for a Christmas present, and I could n't bear to have her disappointed, when she tried so hard to be good."

Mrs. Wilton, after her husband was gone, sat alone in an apartment, surrounded by everything which could gratify a cultivated mind and refined tastes. But nothing had

power to divert her thoughts from her child, on this anniversary of the day when she had so unaccountably disappeared. All at once, her pet dog, a King Charles spaniel, so small as to appear little even among that diminutive genus of the canine family, began to whine, and scratch at the door. She rose, and opened it mechanically. As he joyfully bounded into the room, though she saw that he had something in his mouth, she did not notice what it was. After running round the room, still retaining the plaything in his mouth, in a hurry-skurry way, demonstrative of ecstatic delight, now and then letting it fall long enough to give a quick, joyous bark, then snatching it up, as if afraid of losing it, he seemed suddenly aware of the indifference manifested by his mistress. He stopped short in his gambols, looked her in the face a few moments, then, still holding his treasure in his mouth, he ran and jumped up into her lap.

"Why, what ails you, Donty?" said she; and as, in an absent manner, she began to pat his head, she perceived that it was a child's shoe that he held in his mouth.

"Donty, Donty, where did you get this?" she said, taking hold of it with an eager and a trembling hand.

Donty's joy, at having attracted her attention, was unbounded. He gave another joyous bark, and, wagging his tail, alternately caressed her hand and the little shoe.

"This is Lilia's shoe, shaped by her little foot," she exclaimed. "Oh! where can she be?"

And, in her excitement, she rang the bell with a peal so loud and sharp that the girl whose duty it was to answer it entered the room with looks of alarm.

"Is the errand-boy at home?" asked Mrs. Wilton.

"Yes'am."

"Tell him to come to me."

He was not long in making his appearance.

"John," said she, "I wish to see Mr. Wilton. Go and tell him he must come immediately. Let him have ever so much business on hand, he must n't wait a moment."

"I'll go, ma'am, and won't be long about it neither."

She could not content herself to remain in the house; but went to the door, and looked up and down the street. Few per-

sons, comparatively, were to be seen, as the tide of business flowed in a different direction.

The distance was not great, and Mr. Wilton was not long in reaching home. Mrs. Wilton met him at the door, and, putting the shoe into his hand, said, —

"Look! it is Lilla's."

"Yes: there's no mistake. Where did you get it?"

"Donty brought it in. I don't know where he found it. On the doorsteps, perhaps. She, our own child, — our only one, — may have been there this very morning, in the arms of some strolling, dirty vagrant! Only think of it! such cold, bitter weather!"

At this moment, Mr. Burder came in sight. Certain business transactions had brought him and Mr. Wilton together, so that they were on speaking terms; and, when he had come near enough to enable him to see, Mr. Wilton thought he appeared excited. Mrs. Wilton went into the house; and her husband was about to follow her, when Mr. Burder made a sign for him to remain.

"Good-morning, Mr. Wilton," said he, when he had arrived within speaking distance. "I've lost my pocket-book. There was more than a thousand dollars in it, and a number of valuable papers. That little vagabond that was tramping round here this morning, carrying a child in his arms to make fools of people, and excite their pity, stole it, I've no doubt."

"A boy with a child in his arms? How old a child?"

"Two or three years old, I should think. My wife and Laura pitied them mightily, and would have been glad to feed them with the best there was in the house; but I understand the tricks of such vagrants. When not more than seven years old, they are keen and crafty enough to be twice that age. The one I'm speaking of looked cunning as a fox; and in the face of the little one with him I could see the same kind of look as plain as day, though wife and Laura thought she was pretty and innocent-looking. At any rate, I gave them to understand that they must leave my premises, quick time."

"They were in your house this morning, you say?"

"Yes: they came in while we were eating breakfast. The bold, impudent knave

pushed right by the porter, came into the room, and placed the little one before the fire, without leave or license. But there's a detective on their track by this time; and they'll find safe quarters, I dare say, in the lock-up."

"If you please," said Mr. Wilton, "I should like to make some inquiries of your wife and daughter about them."

"Certainly, certainly. Come right along with me, sir, if you please."

"Mr. Burder tells me," said Mr. Wilton, addressing Mrs. Burder, "that a beggar-boy, with a little girl, was here this morning. Will you be so good as to describe the child to me?"

"I will, with much pleasure. She was not far — so I should think — from three years old; and though her clothes were worn so much as to be ragged, still she was one of the loveliest children I have ever seen. I never saw such beautiful brown eyes in my life. They have haunted me ever since she was here. And then her hair, soft as silk, lay in such shining, golden rings round her forehead."

"Yes," said Laura: "her beauty, and pretty, childish ways, almost bewitched mother and me."

"You have probably heard," said Mr. Wilton, "that we lost our only child a year ago?"

"No," replied Mrs. Burder: "we have lived in this part of the city only a few months."

"I don't mean that our child died."

"How then?"

"She was stolen."

"And you think that the little girl who was here this morning may be the one you lost?"

"I do; and, when so near her father's house, it seems hard that she should miss it. I think, sir," turning to Mr. Burder, "you told me you had put a detective on the children's track?"

"Yes; but the little one, of course, had nothing to do with stealing my pocket-book, so she won't be hurt."

"Stealing your pocket-book, did you say?" said Mrs. Burder.

"Yes. That boy stole it. I suppose I must have laid it down a moment, for something, which gave him a good chance. Sleight-of-hand is one of the accomplishments of such" —

"Here is your pocket-book," interrupted

his wife, handing it to him. "You left it lying on the table, and I did n't notice it till you were gone."

A ring at the door-bell.

"I want to see the lady that lives there," said a sharp, treble voice.

"You can't see her, if you do," said the porter. "But you are the boy," he added, eying him sharply, "that was here this mornin'?"

"Yes: I am."

"Well, wait a minute."

And, going to the apartment where Mr. Burder and the others were assembled, he said, —

"Here 's the thief I heard you say stole your pocket-book: he 's come back of his own accord."

Archie followed him.

"I 've come," said he, "to see if sis did n't lose one of her shoes off when she was in here."

"What did you say about a shoe?" asked Mr. Wilton.

"I said that little sis lost off one of her shoes. I brought her in here to warm, cause you see she was like to freeze, and I did n't know but what she lost it off in here."

"I wish to ask you a few questions," said Mr. Wilton.

Archie made no answer, but braced himself, and put on a bold, defiant look, evidently expecting that he was to be catechized somewhat in the same spirit that he had been an hour or two previously by Mr. Burder.

"I should like to have you tell me who the child is you brought here this morning," he said.

"I don't know nothin' about it," was Archie's answer. "Folks like to ask questions about her; but they don't like to give her anything to eat or to wear, — they 'd see her die first. That man that tends the door called me a thief: I heard him. I never stole in my life; and, if I ever do, 't will be to keep sis from starvin', and not for myself. I 'll work for her, if I can get work; and, if I can't, I 'll steal for her, sooner 'n see her die. I told mother, just afore she died, I 'd take care of her; and that 's what I mean to do, sir. But, after all, it 's poor care the likes of me can take of such a delicate little creature as sis is."

"That 's true, my boy," said Mr. Wilton, who could see that all the bitter antagonism

of his nature was brought into action by the presence of Mr. Burder; "and now, if you will go with me to my house, you 'll find the little shoe you 're in search of."

"Is it there?" asked Archie, with a bright, eager look.

"Yes: I believe it to be the one that you lost."

The manner of Mr. Wilton inspired confidence; and Archie's bold, defiant look, as if by magic, gave place to behaviour gentle and respectful.

He gladly complied with his request.

"Yes, this is the very one sis lost," said Archie, when the shoe was shown him. "I 'm so glad to find it; for sis can't go barefoot, like me, this cold weather."

"Show him the miniature, Mary," said Mr. Wilton to his wife.

"Why, this looks jest as sis did the first time I ever saw her. But she looks paler now than she did then, and her cheeks are kind o' holler."

"Mary," said Mr. Wilton, "our child that was lost is found. There can be no doubt of it. This boy had her with him in the next house this morning."

"Where is she now?" asked Mrs. Wilton. "Where did you leave her? Tell us where she is."

"Is little sis your child, ma'am?" asked Archie.

"Yes: she is my own. I am her mother."

"Then I 'll tell you, ma'am, and 'll be glad to. You see it 's so cold she could n't go round with me, so I left her with a poor woman, 'cause you see poor women are kinder to little ragged ones, like sis, than ladies are. A lady spoke cross to her this mornin', and made her cry, 'cause the wind flapped the corner of her blanket ag'in' her nice fur cloak" —

"Mr. Wilton, let us go at once for her."

"Yes, Mary: I 'll order the carriage."

Then, after the order had been given, he said to Archie, —

"Now, my boy, while you sit and warm yourself, and eat this piece of cake, I wish you to tell us all that you know about the child."

"It 's but little I know," said Archie.

"My mother, about two years after my father died, was married again. One evenin', the man she married come home pretty late; and, when I heard him comin', I run and jumped into bed, and made b'lieve I was

asleep, 'cause he did n't like to see me round. When he come in, he had somethin' in his arms; and he said to mother, 'Here, Mag, 's somethin' to help you airm a livin' with,' and, takin' off an old piece of cloth, I seed 't was a little child, all dressed up in beautiful clothes. He told mother she must go round with her, and make b'lieve she was a poor destitute widder, and folks would give her lots for the sake of the pretty child. Mother begged him to let her be carried back, and placed on the steps of the house he took her from; 'ut he swore at her, and said he 'd kill her, and the child too, if she said a word. Anyhow, he said, whether the child lived or died, he should be revenged on somebody — he would n't tell who — that he hated worse than p'ison."

"What is your step-father's name?"

"Boney Dormand."

"That name, Mary," turning to his wife, "gives us the key to the whole affair; but, though I knew he turned out to be an intemperate and a miserable wretch, I did n't think he was so wicked and malicious as to revenge himself in the way he has, because you chose me instead of him. I had lost sight of him for a year or two, and supposed him to be dead. What did you say your name is, my boy?"

"Archie Linn, sir."

"Well, Archie, the carriage is ready: you will go with us, and show us the way."

They were not long in reaching the old, dilapidated tenement-house in which Archie had left the child.

"Mind where you step, ma'am," said he, leading the way; "for the stairs are kind o' broke away in some places."

When they arrived at the room of Mrs. Carnes, the poor sewing-woman, Archie rapped at the door, and, being bidden to "come in," threw it open.

The mother's eyes swept the room; then she exclaimed wildly, —

"She is n't here! where is she?"

Mrs. Carnes, surprised at the unexpected presence of Mr. and Mrs. Wilton, was confused, and did not understand that the inquiry was for the child.

"It's little sis that the lady means," said Archie, looking around with anxiety; for he was afraid his step-father had somehow found where she was, and taken her away.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Carnes, "I did n't think of little sis. She dropped to sleep, and so I

put her on the bed behind this curtain. Here she is, if you 'd like to see her;" and she drew the curtain aside. "She's still got hold of the little doll she had a-playin' with."

In a moment, both father and mother were at the bedside. How lovely and innocent she looked! Her soft golden curls were tumbled somewhat, and the color of her cheeks deepened by slumber to a rosier glow; while her scarlet lips were a little apart, showing the milk white teeth.

"They leaned above her, drinking her as wine,
In that extremity of love: 't will pass
For agony or rapture."

"Lillian! my Lillian!" said the mother softly.

And the red lips smiled. Perhaps she dreamed that an angel was speaking to her. And as they, the happy father and mother, stood there side by side, that mean garret-room, with nothing but tokens of penury and pinching want on every hand, was an Eden to them. At last the mother bent, and kissed the soft, rosy cheek of her slumbering child. Lillia opened her eyes, saw the gentle face bending over her, and, uttering the word "Mamma!" raised her arms, and twined them round her mother's neck. It is not likely that she recognized her; but the bright, loving face beaming upon her satisfied the cravings of her little heart, filling it with peace and love.

Dormand, Archie's step-father, died soon after he and sis made their escape, the victim of intemperance. Mrs. Carnes, the poor sewing-woman, remained only a short time in her comfortless garret; as Mrs. Wilton, who needed a seamstress, pleased with the kindly spirit she had manifested, and pitying her toilsome and cheerless lot, gave her employment and a home. Mr. Wilton, having found other employment for his errand-boy, took Archie on trial to fill his place; and, finding him willing, ready, and faithful, he gave him the privilege of acquiring a good mercantile education, and subsequently employed him as a salesman.

Fifteen years from the day he entered the house of Mr. Burder, with "sis" in his arms, Archibald Linn was Mr. Wilton's confidential clerk; and Lillia, with the free and full approbation of her parents, was his promised wife.

THE STORY OF CLARE ASHCROFT.

BY FLORENCE EDWIN.

WE two, Clare Ashcroft and I, Paul Chal-deur, walked up and down the moon-lighted beach upon whose sandy shores the wind, holding high carnival, dashed the riotous foam-crested waves.

The same wind tossed Clare's golden tresses about her lovely highbred face in wild disorder. An expression of deep sadness was in the large soulful eyes questioning mine so wistfully, for I—well, I had asked Clare to marry me, and she had refused me, gently yet firmly, leaving me not the ghost of a hope that I could ever be more than a dear friend.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am for this, Paul," she was saying, in the clear musical tone characteristic of her—the tone itself assuring me of the sincerity of her regret. "I never thought you cared for me in that way. I can't tell you what a priceless boon your friendship is to me; and being three years your senior, I felt ages older than you, which must be my excuse if my manner has misled you. Now, since it is utterly impossible for me to return your love, perhaps I ought to send you away from me, but that I am sure that course would not cure a person of your disposition. Instead, I am going to take you into my confidence, and tell you the story of my life. When you have heard it, you will see how impossible it is for us to be more than friends. Perhaps you will understand how great is this proof of my friendship, when I tell you that you are the only person, except my father and one other, to whom I have confided it."

I was more touched than I cared to show by Clare's words. I looked at her gratefully, for the time incapable of speech. Other women might have thought me stupid, unfeeling; but Clare understood the glance as well as if I had spoken. She went on, speaking rapidly yet distinctly:

"You know that I am an orphan, and an heiress. My father died three years ago, when I was in my twenty-fifth year; my mother, when I was in my ninth year. Two years after my mother's death my father married again—a stately beautiful woman, who repelled all demonstrations of

affection on my part, and whom I soon came to regard as the *bete noir* of my life. Not content with this, she soon made me believe that my father's heart was estranged from me, while, on the other hand, she made him believe the same of me. Put that idea into the mind of two sensitive proud beings, and you can guess the result.

"I grew up to womanhood believing that no one in the wide world loved me, and yet how I craved that some one should! Above all loves I longed for my father's, for nothing could entirely crush out my love for him. How many times have I gone to my room, and throwing myself upon my knees, wept passionately, beseeching my Heavenly Father to take me, that I might be united to the mother who, I was sure, loved me, and whose gentle spirit could not be tranquil witnessing the daily agony I endured.

"But though my father denied me his love, I had nothing else of which to complain. All that could be done to make me educated, accomplished, in the fullest meaning of these terms, was done. I knew afterwards how great was his pride at the success I attained by close application, for who can be educated or accomplished without?

"When I was nineteen, I accepted an invitation from a school friend to pay her a visit. Fannie Leigh's family were respectable well-to-do people, but far beneath mine in birth, position and wealth, and my father at first was unwilling that I should go to them, and only consented with the greatest reluctance; nor do I think he would have done so at all had it not been for my stepmother's intervention. To my surprise, she seconded my wishes, telling my father that the country air and retirement—for Fannie's home was among the breezy New Hampshire hills—would benefit me much more than a summer at Long Branch. Would to Heaven that I had never undertaken that journey! but who can avoid the path Destiny has marked out for the soul to tread?

"Fannie's family consisted of her mother, brother and herself. Well, I had craved for love, and certainly my cravings should have been satisfied, for at that house I re-

calved my fill. My simplest wish was a law, and I was flattered and made much of to my heart's content—petted by Fannie and Mrs. Leigh, and by Oscar. What more need I say than that he was young, handsome, fascinating—and selfish? The last-named quality, however, I did not discover till it was too late.

"I can see, now, how easy it was for him to win my love, how easy for me to think I loved him. I did not then know that some men would sell their souls cheap, their honor cheaper, for gold. Pray God few women may learn the lesson as I learned it! Thank Heaven that there are not many men like Oscar Leigh—not many women like his mother! Both, holding honorable respectable positions in society, were utterly devoid of heart, honor, religion, even. Why, even the social Pariahs on whom our sex virtuously frown from the safe haven where it is impossible to realize the dangers and temptations by which they fell—why, even they could have done no worse than to take base advantage of a young girl's innocence, trade upon her hungering for affection, and tempt her to the commission of a folly which brought to her deep suffering. You look at me with incredulous wonder. I can follow the workings of your mind, and assure you that it is not what you think. No power could induce me to relinquish my honor."

"I am sure of that," I said, warmly; "and indeed you wrong me if you believe that I for a moment doubted it. The natural consequence of your delusion flashed across my mind, that was all."

"Delusion!" she repeated, musingly; "it was indeed a delusion. Under its influence I entered into a clandestine engagement with Oscar Leigh. Would that had been all! But before I left his home to return to my father's house, I had been a wife three weeks."

"Impossible!" I cried; "my wildest imaginings—"

"Your wildest imaginings," she interrupted, calmly, "could not picture that any delusion would make a woman forget what she owed to herself, to her parent. You are not more shocked now than was I when the nefarious proposal was made. But his oily tongue subdued my angry indignation, conquered my scruples; yet I am sure that I never would have consented had it not been for Mrs. Leigh. Oscar had told me

that my father would never consent to an engagement, and would force me to marry one in my own position; whereas, if we were married, he would be utterly powerless, and rather than have a scandal, would forgive us. 'Should he not,' he said, 'I, by my love, will make your life so happy that you will never regret the sacrifice you make.'

"He talked and pleaded, and then left me, but sent Mrs. Leigh to me to induce me to consent. She represented that if anything should happen to part us, Oscar would take his life; that his blood would be on my head, etc.; and I was idiot enough to believe it all, and finally gave my consent, unconsciously signing the death-warrant to my future happiness. It was arranged that the marriage be kept private until I was twenty-one. At that time I should come into possession of my mother's fortune, and should my father then cast me off, I might still live surrounded by elegancies and luxuries which he, Oscar, declared he was far too generous to consent to deprive me of. I was only too willing to agree to this, for I feared my father's anger when he should learn the truth. Then, too, Oscar had told me—and this had been one of the most powerful inducements to my consent—that during that time should either regret the step taken, a divorce should be procured as silently and as secretly as the marriage had been consummated. At that time it seemed impossible that I should ever desire it.

"I shall not try to excuse the step I took. That I did wrong, and that my punishment for the commission of that wrong seemed harder than I could bear, is equally true. Now, it seems to me that I must have been dazzled, intoxicated, almost insane with love—a love that died a swift sure death; that was already on the wane when I reached my father's house.

"I can't tell you the principal cause. Suffice it to say, that in my father's library I read a book that opened my eyes completely. The book was a treatise on the relation between husband and wife, clearly and unmistakably pointing out what it should be, and how often and terribly it was abused. Need I say more than that Oscar Leigh had violated it in the extreme?

"And all this time that my eyes were thus being opened, I was a prey to the keenest remorse, the deepest humiliation, the bitterest self-reproach for the deception practised

toward my father. At last, I could bear it no longer, and I wrote to Oscar Leigh, telling him of the change in my feelings, and asking him to keep his promise, never dreaming my request would meet with a refusal. How fallacious were my hopes! Instead of a letter, he came down post haste to answer it in person.

"I received his card just as we were sitting down to dinner. My father, learning the name of my visitor, insisted, with his habitual courtesy, upon my asking him to share his hospitality. I entered the drawing-room, and found him pacing up and down, an insolent smile upon his face. Spare me the details of that terrible interview. I learned for the first time the true nature of the man to whom I was bound. Whatever I had suspected, I did not think him capable of so much meanness, insolence and total depravity of nature. He absolutely refused to procure a divorce, or allow me to take measures for that purpose. He declared that he would immediately acquaint my father with the truth, who would compel me to live with him.

"'Compel me!' I thought, bitterly; 'he could not, nor could any power force me to live with a man I loathe.' Aloud I said, 'You may be right, and if it be so, I would rather wait until I have received my mother's fortune, by which I may live luxuriously, if not happily.'

"He applauded me for my decision, and at last I induced him to take his departure, he little guessing that what I had said had been said to gain time, and also with the determination to be myself the one to tell my father the whole shameful story, to beg him to aid me in getting a divorce from the wretch who, in the eye of the law, was my husband.

"After Oscar Leigh's departure, I remained some time pondering deeply on the best way of communicating the story. No plan presented itself, and at last, in despair, I rang the bell, desiring the maid who answered it to ask my father to come to me. I remember that she looked at me wonderingly, and when I caught a glimpse of my white haggard face in the mirror, I was not surprised.

"My father entered the apartment looking greatly alarmed. The girl had remarked upon the strangeness of my looks, and he had quickly obeyed my summons, fearing he knew not what. He approached me, and

taking my hand, said, in an anxious tone:

"'Clare! daughter! what has happened?'

"'How can I tell you?' I cried, passionately. 'O father! if you had not withheld from me your love, I might not stand before you to-day bowed with humiliation and shame.'

"'Humiliation and shame?' my father interrogated, in a perplexed tone. 'Child, your words stab me keenly, while they fill me with dire forebodings. My love has never been withheld from you. If it has not been demonstrated, whose fault but yours? Have you not shown me plainly since I married your stepmother that all filial love and affection had left your heart?'

"'No!' I retorted, fiercely; 'if I have caused you to think thus, it has been unintentional on my part. Your wife made me understand, long years ago, that there was room only for her in your heart. I was too proud to solicit what was mine by right. Her word alone would not have been sufficient, had not your own manner convinced me that she spoke truly. Then, though I drew back within myself, though I appeared cold and indifferent, I could not force out of my nature the love for you that was a part of it. You do not know how many hours of anguish have been mine, or my bitter reflections because of our estrangement. I tell you this that you may more readily see how easily I was duped. It was with these feelings that I went to visit the Leighs. Then—'

"My voice faltered, my courage forsook me. How could I tell him! I glanced up in my father's face imploringly, and burst into a paroxysm of bitter weeping.

"My father put his arm about me, endeavoring to soothe me by comforting words and tender caresses that I had never dared to dream I should receive from his lips. By degrees he drew from me the confession of my folly. I shall never forget the agony of that hour, the terrible effect upon my father as he learned the wretched story. His self-reproach was pitiful, while his anger and resentment toward the Leighs knew no bounds.

"For me, he showed tenderest pity, while big tears coursed down his cheeks mingling with mine as he realized the bitter truth that all this might not—nay, would not—have been, had the natural relations of father and daughter existed between us. Naturally, we both felt justly angry at the

woman who had insidiously poisoned our minds. In the midst of it all she entered the room, smiling, and with that easy careless grace characteristic of her. Meeting my father's stern angry look, mine indignant and resentful, she stood for a moment transfixed. My father thus addressed her in a cold bitter tone:

" 'Madam, to you, and to my blind infatuation for you, I owe this terrible sorrow that has befallen me. To both of us, Clare owes years of bitter jealous misery. The ugly seeds you sowed in my mind, you sowed also in hers. With honeyed words of poisoned sweetness you made me believe what you would, and made me forget the duty I owed her dead mother and her. Had I not been a credulous infatuated fool, I should long ago have found you out. I might forgive you for making a fool of me; for making me unjust—never!'

"My stepmother had listened to my father, her large dark eyes dilating with horror, a grayish pallor settling over her still handsome features. As he finished, she uttered a shriek which rings in my ears yet, and throwing up her arms wildly, fell senseless on the thick velvet carpet, the blood gushing from her mouth.

"Ah Paul! but that was a terrible time. It seems to me now like some horrid nightmare. My stepmother never spoke again. She had burst a bloodvessel in that moment which must have been to her one of supreme agony, when she knew that her sin had found her out, and heard the man she loved speak to her those terrible words. She died that night, and we could not wish her back. Had she lived, she would have been my father's wife only to the world. After the funeral was over, my father sought Oscar Leigh. Threats and inducements were alike useless to force him to keep his promise. I was his wife, he said, doggedly, and the law could not separate us unless he chose.

"I was, you see, utterly powerless. I had no witness to prove that Oscar had gained my consent to the marriage chiefly on the proviso that a divorce should be procured if desired, both Fannie and her mother declaring that Oscar had never made me such a promise. Besides, he had not deserted me—I had deserted him—and he was the one to sue for the divorce, that being the only ground upon which it could be granted.

"But when he found, beyond the shadow

of a doubt, that I was determined never to live with him, and that my father offered to me his protection and a home with him, and that not the smallest portion of my fortune could ever be his without my consent, he began to waver.

"Thoroughly disgusted with him, my father placed the affair in the hands of his lawyer, instructing him to offer him twenty thousand dollars if he would sue for a divorce. But this was not tempting enough for the wretch. 'Make it fifty thousand and I'm your man,' was his stubborn declaration.

"My father consented, and the payment of that sum made me a free woman again. O, I can't tell you the maddening torture of that year for both my father and myself. Happily, the affair was unknown to any save those immediately concerned in it. Oscar Leigh and his family, before the payment of the hush-money, signed a paper by which they forfeited the money should the secret be disclosed. But they were as anxious to remain silent as we were to have them. This may appear strange; but after all was over between us they departed for California, where, with their ill-gotten gain, they duped society into believing them one of the first families of the South. Oscar Leigh married a woman of fortune, and is one of the wealthiest merchants in San Francisco. Both his mother and sister have since died.

"Behold me, then, not quite twenty-one years old, with my life shadowed, my future darkened. At that time most women are looking forward into the future with glowing anticipations, bright dreams, ardent hopes. But for me the future held what? only misery; for in store for me there was waiting, like some bird of prey, another sorrow to which the first was only as the light summer wind to the fierce northern blast. It came in the fair smiling land of Italy that it came to me—the land of flowers, love and music. Father and I went abroad shortly after I had attained my twenty first year. We remained away four years. The third year of our stay we spent in Florence. We had the entree to the best society, and it was at a carnival fete that I met the Marquis Lidini.

"Well, we met, we loved, we parted; that is the brief history of that sorrow."

"But if you loved each other, why need you have parted?" I interrogated.

"Why," she repeated, musingly, while a dreamy look came into the lovely eyes looking far off across the moon-lighted waters. "Have I not said that one act of mine darkened my life? The Marquis Lidini could not marry a divorced woman."

"Because of his religion, I suppose?"

"No," she responded, sadly, "for love of me he would have *abjured his religion*, embracing mine, had it been necessary. But he was, like me, a Protestant. Religion did not bar our marriage. Shall I weary you if I tell you what did?"

"Weary me, dear Clare! that would be impossible. If you can honor me with your confidence without pain to yourself, I am only too willing to listen."

"Thank you!" she said, simply. "Listen then—a marriage was impossible between us because he had made his dying father a solemn promise never to marry a divorced woman. You wonder at this, but his father had been the dupe of a woman who had made him her slave while she was bound to the man who discarded her on account of the *liaison* between her and the marquis. So great was the latter's infatuation for her that he married her as soon as her marital bonds were severed. Then to his everlasting shame and horror, he discovered the kind of a woman he had put in his dead wife's honored place. She attempted to gain the young marquis's affections, and being unsuccessful, hated him fiercely and vindictively.

"She attempted to sow discord between father and son, but was frustrated in her wicked designs, the former having overheard her nefarious proposals to his son. With bitter imprecations he thrust her from the protection of his title. I need not tell you the course of life upon which she entered.

"With such bitter experience he warned his son, and upon his deathbed willingly claimed his promise never to ally himself to a woman that had been divorced. Little dreamed he that the only woman in the world he could ever love would come under that head! If we had only known in time of this barrier to our union—and yet, in spite of all the pain and suffering that has been mine, I cannot wish that we had never loved each other. It is four years since we parted, and I love him the same to-day as I loved him then. If it be God's will that we be united, well and good; if not, if we must

live out our lives alone, I pray that the life be not long; that both of us may be called away from this world of sorrows, for in heaven, at least, we shall be united."

The low pathetic ring of her last words went to my heart, and I am not ashamed to say that tears came into my eyes. It seemed too hard that a beautiful good woman like *Clare Ashcroft* should have so desolate a life. A woman fitted in every way to make home the dearest spot on earth, to realize a man's fondest dreams of a perfect woman, was forced by fate's harsh decree to walk alone life's pathway. Suddenly a thought occurred to me, and I said eagerly:

"If Oscar Leigh should die the barrier would be removed, and you might be happy."

"Yes," she said, wearily; "but I build no hopes on '*dead men's shoes*.'"

"Neither do I," I returned; "but I do believe in a just God, and I can't think he will permit you to bear the burden forever. Clare, I can't explain it, but I have an intuitive conviction that that rascal out in San Francisco will get his deserts, and that you won't have to wait until you get to heaven to be united to your lover. I can, from the bottom of my heart, wish that you may be."

"Thank you," she said, with a grateful pressure of the small hand upon my arm. "I knew you to be a dear unselfish Paul, else I never would have given you my confidence. And don't you think now that you know how impossible it is for there to be any talk of love between us—don't you think we may be—friends?"

"Indeed I do," I returned, warmly; "I can't get over loving you just yet. My heart is sore over the might-have-been, but I would *not give up your friendship* for all the world holds. Indeed, I would rather go on loving you, hoping for no return, than to have the love of any other woman I know."

"But I don't want you to do that," she said, with a sad smile. "You're just the sort of a man to make a woman happy, and I hope the day may not be far distant when you will love again—happily. There, not another word. If you persist, I shall fear I have not done wisely. Come, let us go back to the *hotel, the hollow empty world* which—"

"Which does not dream that the woman who queens it right royally, whose goodness is on every tongue, is bravely bearing a

cross under which a nature less pure, less strong, would falter, making her life not only a misery to herself but to every one about her. Clare Ashcroft, I think you are one of the noblest of women! Seeing your life, knowing your sad story, you will always be to me the realization of my ideal of pure womanhood."

Two years have passed since I spoke those words to Clare Ashcroft. About a year after I proposed to her, and when I learned why my love was hopeless, Oscar Leigh was

thrown from his horse and instantly killed. Shortly afterwards, Clare's marriage with the marquis took place. Everybody wondered, some envied, and a great many rejoiced at Clare's "good luck." The marquis bore his bride to his ancestral palace, where their lives flow on serenely and happily. As for me, well, I have not yet fulfilled Clare's prophecy, and made "some woman in the world one of the best of husbands." As yet, no other woman has usurped Clare's place in my heart; nor do I think one ever will.

THE HEIRESS AND HER GUARDIAN.

A TALE OF ENGLISH COUNTRY LIFE.

BY MRS. H. LOVETT CAMERON.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

COLONEL FLEMING, thus suddenly ushered into the room, made one step forward, and then stopped short in some confusion.

"My dear Mrs. Travers, you are in trouble—what is the matter? can I help you? or rather I had better leave you—I have come at an inopportune moment."

Juliet was standing with her face turned away from him, stifling down those bitter sobs which his entrance had interrupted. For a moment, prudence and wisdom counselled her to say, "Yes, leave me, I am not well," and let him go. But for one moment, and then the old impetuous nature rose within her, the nature that was weak and uncalculating in its possibly unwise impulses, yet ever true and honest to itself.

She turned quickly towards him, and placed the faded yellow letter in his hands.

"Not inopportune, Colonel Fleming," she said, in a low trembling voice, as she looked up at him with eyes all heavy with unshed tears; "you never came at a more appropriate moment—look at that!"

Hugh Fleming looked down at the torn paper she had thrust into his hand, and turned it over wonderingly.

"What is it?" he said; and then with a sudden flush he recognized his own handwriting, and remembered at once what letter it was that she had given him.

He looked up at her almost angrily, and then walked to the window, and stood with his back towards her.

What did she mean by showing him this old, disregarded, disdained love-letter, of which for years she had never given the faintest sign or acknowledgment? was it to mock at his love and to insult him?

But no! what then meant her tears and her agitation? and why was the letter all torn and mutilated?

"What does it mean?" he asked, coming back close to her as she stood with drooping head, supporting herself with both hands against the edge of the table.

"It means—" she said, looking up at him, whilst a bright flush covered her face—"it means, that for years I have misunderstood you and done you injustice, that I thought you had scorned and forsaken me—it means that I have found out my mistake—it means that—O God, Hugh! it means that my heart is broken!"

With a cry she sank down again as he had first found her, with her arms stretched out before her and her head bowed upon them, whilst convulsive sobs shook her whole frame.

Scarcely as yet understanding her meaning, but filled nevertheless with a great yearning pity for her sorrow, Hugh Fleming stood by her side softly stroking the small dusky head as it lay bowed down in bitter grief before him.

"My poor child!" he said, gently, whilst his compassionate hands strayed tenderly as a woman's over her soft dark hair, and by degrees the soothing touch quieted and calmed her.

"Now tell me, Juliet," he said at length, when her sobs had ceased, and he had with gentle force raised her and placed her in an armchair; "tell me now, for I hardly understand what you mean, and why the sight of that old forgotten letter should have upset you so strangely."

"O, don't you understand," she said, wringing her hands together, "don't you see that I never received it—never saw it until to-day?"

Colonel Fleming started.

"Never saw it before!" he repeated in amazement. "What do you mean! can you mean that you never received it?"

"Never!"

"That you thought I had left England for years without a line or a word—that I had deserted you in such a heartless way, Juliet! did you think that of me?" he asked in great agitation.

Juliet nodded sadly.

"I did think all that of you," she answered, sorrowfully. "I lost my belief in you and in all mankind."

"But I cannot understand it," he said, passing his hand in a bewildered way over his forehead; "it seems impossible. Why, I wrote it quite a week before I left England, and, yes—I remember perfectly that I posted it myself—and, of course I could not have addressed it wrongly—it seems impossible that it could have gone wrong! and besides, if so, how did it come into your possession now? by what chance have you suddenly found it again?"

"It was brought to me not ten minutes ago by Ernestine—you don't remember Ernestine? she was my stepmother's French maid. It seems that Mrs. Blair has sent her away very suddenly for some cause or other; and partly, I suspect, from revenge, partly to extract money from me, she brought me this letter."

"But how on earth did she get it?"

"Her story is that she has only just found it slipped down between the linings of an old dress which Mrs. Blair gave her about that time, and which she had never unpacked nor made any use of; but that in turning out all her things, in order to pack them to go away, this old fragment of a letter fell out. She says—what must be true—that Mrs. Blair stole it out of the post-bag and destroyed it."

"Good God! what could induce the woman to commit such an iniquity!" exclaimed Hugh, pacing excitedly up and down the room. "What cause, what possible reason, could she have for such a wicked action?"

"It seems indeed hardly conceivable that any one could do such a thing," answered Juliet; "and yet I suppose that there is very little a spiteful wicked woman will not do to injure another."

"But was she indeed so wicked and spiteful?" asked Hugh, as he came back and sat down beside her. "Are you indeed sure that it was Mrs. Blair who did this thing? it hardly seems consistent with her character. I remember she used often to speak of you to me with great affection; and although she always seemed to be a very silly and conceited woman, yet I should have thought her a perfectly harmless one. Indeed, Juliet, I used often to think that you were hard on her."

"Did you?" said Juliet, in astonishment; "Did you really? In what way could you have thought me hard on her?"

"I never thought that you made suffi-

cient allowance for her very frivolous and childish nature."

"Ah, you did not know her as well as I did!" said Juliet, with a short bitter laugh. "All that silly gushing childishness was put on. Mrs. Blair is by no means a fool; she is as cunning and designing a woman as I have ever met in my life, and perfectly dishonest and unscrupulous. Years ago I remember how she used to work and work with that soft playful manner, and yet with untiring perseverance, at anything she wanted to get out of my poor father. Young as I was, I could see perfectly through all her lies and her artifices. I believe she moved heaven and earth to get my father to make a will that would give her a life interest in Sotherne, curtail my rights, and place me under her guardianship and control. But my father was too wise for that; and when she found how things had been left, she hated me. Outwardly she was all sweetness and affection, because it suited her interests to be so; but in reality she hated me bitterly because I was rich and she was poor, because Sotherne was mine and she only a guest in it at my pleasure."

"But still," argued Colonel Fleming, "why should she have stopped my letter? it seems such a senseless, meaningless piece of spite."

"She stopped your letter because—because—" said Juliet, hesitatingly, and a deep flush covered her face as she nevertheless ended her sentence bravely—"because she knew that had I received it I should have married you."

Hugh Fleming shaded his face with his hand and was silent.

"She had found out that much about me," continued Juliet, after a short silence; "she was sharp enough for that; and you know I was never very clever at hiding my feelings," she added with a little sad smile that was unspeakably touching.

Still Colonel Fleming did not speak, and Juliet went on, after a pause:

"Had things turned out so, it is certain that Sotherne and not London would have been my permanent home—and in that case Mrs. Blair would certainly not have continued to live there. I could never have tolerated her presence—she would have been forced to seek another home; and Sotherne is a comfortable house, and she gets it rent free. It would not at all have suited her to leave it. She did not want to leave it.

What she wanted is exactly what has happened. I see perfectly through all her devices now; she wanted me to marry a man who had no country tastes, whose society was not a sufficient resource to me to enable me to endure it in the retirement of a country home, and as whose wife I should probably prefer the excitement and variety of a London life. Everything," added Juliet, very bitterly, "everything has turned out perfectly to her satisfaction; she first intercepted and tore up your letter—she then urged a marriage with Cis upon me in every possible way; other circumstances—poor little Georgie's death and my own utter recklessness and misery—played most conveniently into her hands. Mrs. Blair has remained in undisturbed possession of Sothorne Court, and I—have made shipwreck of my life!"

Juliet ceased speaking, and bowed her head down upon her hands; whilst Hugh Fleming hastily left her side, and, walking away to the window, stood for some minutes with his back turned to her.

When he turned again and spoke to her, his voice was hoarse and trembling.

"Tell me one thing," he said. "You have said that your faith in me was broken; is that faith now restored, Juliet? will you trust me again now?"

"Trust you!" she exclaimed, rising quickly and stretching out both her hands towards him. "Trust you! How can you ask it! Yes, through life unto death!"

"God bless you for that!" he answered. For one moment he bent over the hands he held within his, and pressed them passionately to his lips—then suddenly dropped them hastily, and without another word turned away and left her alone.

As the front door closed behind Hugh Fleming, the luncheon bell rang. Juliet hastily roused herself, brushed away the traces of her emotion, and went down stairs.

It is all the same—if our hearts are breaking, if we have lost our money or our happiness, if our eldest son has been rusticated, or our daughter has run away with the doctor's assistant—all the same we must go down to our meals at their stated hours, sit unmoved and impassive through the ordained number of courses, talk of the weather, or of any trivial subject we can think of, with a calm and smiling face; and all that we may conceal our wounds from the servants who wait upon us, and who would

certainly, if we departed from the ordinary routine of our lives, begin to wonder and chatter over what ailed us.

Juliet Travers would have given a great deal to have escaped the tedious luncheon-hour, with the two solemn men-servants in attendance—but it was impossible. She went down and found Cis already at table. For a wonder no one had "dropped in," and the husband and wife were alone.

"Not a thing fit to eat!" Cis said irritably as his wife came in, and not looking up at her. "You know I can't bear all these brown sauces—they always disagree with me; and this is the third day running you have had roast chickens for luncheon. I really wish, Juliet, you would see to things a little better."

"I am very sorry, Cis," said Juliet, rather absently, sitting down and helping herself mechanically to the first thing that was handed to her.

Her husband sat opposite to her, looking the picture of misery. Like most people of delicate health and indolent habits, he was extremely fastidious and dainty in the matter of food.

When they were first married, Juliet had taken some pains to study his tastes and fancies in this respect; but when she found that, do what she would, Cis always grumbled equally, she gave up the effort to satisfy him as a hopeless task.

The cooking was always either too plain or too rich to suit him; this was too strong-flavored, and that had not flavor enough; and it generally ended in his pushing away his food untasted, and leaving the table in a fit of bad temper that was absolutely childish.

Juliet had no sympathy whatever for these daily complaints. She only felt pity, almost contempt, for a man who could make a misery out of such trifles.

"What's this?" said Cis, standing up and poking his fork into a game-pie. "All messed up with aspic jelly! Can't one get a good honest piece of roast meat in the house?"

"There is some cold beef on the side-board," said Juliet, with a not very lively interest in her voice.

"Yes; I dare say! as tough as leather! I wish you would change the butcher; we get worse meat than anybody else in London."

"Who's that went out just now?" asked Cis, presently, as Juliet did not answer him.

"It was Colonel Fleming," she answered, shortly.

"Then why couldn't you have asked him to lunch?"

"It is a good thing I did not, as you say everything is so nasty," she said, with a laugh. "But Colonel Fleming would have stayed, I suppose if he had wished to do so; I did not think it necessary to ask him."

"No, you can have all your stuck-up lords and swells here every day, but you can't be civil to an old friend like Fleming!" said Cis tauntingly.

Juliet bit her lip and was silent.

"I am going down to Sotherne to-morrow," she said, presently; "we have no dinner engagement to-morrow, and I am thinking of running down for the day."

Now it so happened that Cis was under promise to take Gretchen Rudenbach down to the Crystal Palace for an afternoon concert, and he had been wondering much how he should manage to escape unnoticed from home for the best part of the day.

Cis was at heart terribly afraid of his wife. His friendship with Gretchen was, in truth, of the most innocent character, and if from the first he had made no secret of it with his wife, she would probably have been only too glad that he should find amusement any where, to object in the very least to it. But he had liked to keep up the little halo of romance with which his intercourse with Gretchen had from the first been surrounded. Cis Travers thought of no actual evil with regard to Gretchen Rudenbach, and yet he would have liked to be suspected of it; and it flattered his vanity to compromise her by taking her about with him rather publicly.

More than once lately he had been noticed at Richmond and at Maidenhead on a hot afternoon, with the blue-eyed music-player, when his wife was driving in the Park, or entertaining her friends at afternoon strawberries and tea—perfectly unconscious of her husband's occupations.

And it so happened that Cis had one of these expeditions with Gretchen in contemplation for the morrow, and had, moreover, been wondering what excuse he could frame for dining as well as spending the afternoon at Crystal Palace. So that, when Juliet announced her intention of going down to Sotherne, his face cleared at once, and he answered with alacrity:

"Well, I think you had better; you have

not been down to Sotherne for some time, and you ought to run down occasionally. You won't want me, I suppose?"

"O dear no, thank you! I am only going to see Mrs. Blair, and to look how Andrews has planted the garden out this summer. And perhaps I shall go on to Broadley and bring Flora back with me, if she can get ready in time."

"Very well, then; as you say we have no dinner engagement, I think I will dine out, and then you need not hurry back before the evening train; it will be cooler for you to come back by, this hot weather; and if you are home by half-past nine, it will, I suppose, be in plenty of time for your evening engagements; if I am dining out, it will leave you free."

"Thank you, Cis," said Juliet, slightly surprised, for her husband did not often study her convenience and comfort. "It will be pleasanter, certainly, to come up by the later train, and will give me more time there. O yes, I shall be in plenty of time; I have only Lady Withers's ball, and need not go to that till eleven—and if I am tired, I shall very likely not go to it at all."

And so it was settled.

Cis went his way up to Notting Hill after lunch, to settle with Gretchen about calling for her the next day, and to ask her to dine with him at the Crystal Palace after the concert; whilst Juliet went about her daily round of visits and shopping. But driving along at a footpace under the trees in the Park, listening wearily the while to Mrs. Dalmaine's chatter, she felt, notwithstanding, that the world was a little better and brighter, and happier to her for that torn yellow letter that was folded upon her heart.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

SMOTHERED in dust, and creaking dismally like a creature in agonies, the twelve o'clock train was steaming into the station at Sotherne.

The very sight made one hot—so covered with fine white dust and begrimed with dirt and heat was every carriage and every passenger.

Simmonds, the porter, had sauntered leisurely forwards. No one now ever got out at Sotherne, and, apparently, no one ever got in—no one at least, of any significance. Only a fat farmer from a second-class car-

riage, and two rough-looking drovers from a third, got out; whilst one girl with a bundle in a blue-checked handkerchief was waiting to get in.

To-day, however, there was a little variety, for a lady got out of one of the dusty, hot-cushioned first-class carriages.

At the sight of her Simmonds, who had been bestowing considerable attention upon the blue-bundled young lady, suddenly and mercifully left that damsel to find a seat for herself, and hurried forward, touching his cap obsequiously.

"I don't think the carriage has come yet, ma'am," he said, taking Mrs. Travers's handbag and shawl from her, and shading his eyes with his hand as he looked down the white highroad.

"I don't expect the carriage," answered Mrs. Travers. "Is your wife quite well, and the baby?"

"Quite well, thank you, ma'am. You will find it very hot walking, ma'am," added the man, respectfully. "Should I send a boy up to the house to say you've come, ma'am? He wouldn't be gone long, if you would not mind sitting in the waiting-room."

"No, thank you, Simmonds; I had rather walk. I shall go slowly, and I dare say I shall not find it very hot."

Nevertheless Juliet did find it very hot indeed.

It was one of those perfectly breezeless, cloudless days, when the whole air seems hazy and swimming with the heat. By the time she had walked along the quarter of a mile of dusty highroad, she began to regret that she had not allowed Simmonds to send up the boy for the carriage. But the worst part of the walk was over.

Presently, by a path well known to her she turned into a waving cornfield, cutting off the corner of which she came to a small wicket gate which led into her own park. Here at once was shade, and peace, and loveliness.

Juliet was in no hurry; she sat down under the first tree she came to and took off her hat.

Before her lay the cornfield through which she had passed, already in full ear, flecked all over with blue and purple cornflowers and great scarlet poppies, above which a thousand white and yellow butterflies fluttered ceaselessly; behind her were the great woods that were her own; from their deep shades she could hear the soft cooing of the

wood-pigeons, the occasional crackle of the branches as some squirrel scampered along them, and the soft everlasting ripple of the leaves. A little stream babbled fresh and cool at her feet, fringed by drooping ferns and tall meadow-sweet and starlike wild-parsley flowers. Behind her, from the green slope hard by, came the steady munch of big-eyed dark-skinned Alderney cows standing knee-deep in the luscious grass; and right above her head, in the deep blue sky, was one fluttering lark singing away with all his might and main.

Sweet sounds, and sights, and smells! How delicious, how wonderful, after months of brick and mortar, of the stone pavements and the stunted shrubs of London squares! How intoxicating to find one's self suddenly transported into a scene like this! What a feast for the tired eyes is all the luxuriant greenery of midsummer! What peace to the wearied ears and head are the hundred hushing sounds of a summer's day!

Who is there that understands the country with the deep joy, the intensity of appreciation, the delight too rapturous for words, of the imprisoned Londoner set free for one blessed day from the unloveliness of his daily surroundings!

It is worth while to live nine months of the year in a city for the sake of the keen delight of the other three; a delight which I believe no country-nurtured person, however fond he may be of country life and country pursuits, ever understands and realizes with the same intensity.

Juliet had all the vivid imagination, the deep poetry of soul, which is above all needful to constitute a true lover of nature. It was not merely to her a fine day and a pleasant prospect; there was a whole world to her in the fair sights and sounds around her. There was a meaning in the deep shadows under the trees and the yellow glare of the sunlight beyond, a rhythm in every babble of the brook, a poem in every waving flower on its banks; it was like an essay on life to her to sit and look upon it all, like a lesson in all that is best, and purest, and loveliest. Sweet teachings of nature! how is it that to some you are but a blank meaningless page, whilst others can read all the wisdom of your hidden story as in an open book?

Tired with the heat of her journey, and soothed by the murmuring sounds around her, Juliet leant her head back against the lime-tree under which she sat, and gradual-

ly fell asleep. A little breeze from beneath the drooping woods caught the soft rings of her dark hair; low-voiced insects hummed and buzzed about her; flakes of scented blossom fluttered down from the lime-tree above, and the brook gurgling on beside her blended vaguely with the music of her dreams.

Such a sweet picture she looked, sitting there in her cool blue muslin dress, with her head thrown a little back, her lips a little parted, and her hands clasped loosely together in front of her! She looked very young—hardly more than a girl; and yet there were many sad drooping lines on the clear pale face, that would never perhaps look free from care and suffering again.

By-and-by, a cloud stole for an instant over the face of the sun, and with it the breeze freshened. With a start and a little shiver, Juliet awoke and sprang to her feet. "I did not come down here to go to sleep!" she said aloud to herself as she looked at her watch and found that she had wasted nearly half an hour. Skirting the shady border of the wood, she began slowly to climb the side of the hill, and presently the many-twisted chimneys and the three red gables of Sotherne Court appeared before her. Leaving the park, she turned into the gardens through the shrubbery gate. No one seemed to be moving around the house or gardens. It was about the men's dinner-time, and the roller was standing on the lawn and the wheelbarrow on the gravel walk just as Andrews and his assistant had left them to go off to their midday meal.

The windows stood wide open, and soft muslin draperies fluttered out from the morning-room. Mrs. Blair had adopted as her own the little morning-room that used in the old days to be Juliet's especial retreat. It was here that she was sitting on this particular morning. A white muslin dress plentifully adorned with pink ribbons decked the somewhat angular lines of her spare figure, and a mobcap of muslin and lace to match, invested her with a combined elegance and simplicity suitable to the novel character of a betrothed damsel in which she was now figuring.

She sat on the sofa, whilst in front of her on a low stool squatted the happy lover, obediently holding a skein of white wool, which his lady-love was deftly winding off his outstretched red hands.

"Now, Daniel!" said the lady, playfully,

"how can I wind if you fidget so? do keep still!"

"My charming love, who could keep still at the feet of so much beauty!" returned the lover gallantly; "when the heart is on fire, the—ahem, the—a—tenement of clay is naturally restless?"

Mr. Lamplough was secretly ardently desiring to get up, as the position into which Mrs. Blair had sportively pushed him was beginning to be sadly trying to his back and knees.

"You naughty darling!" she answered, laughing affectedly and shaking her finger at him; "always flattering your poor Maria! When we are married, Daniel, I am afraid you will no longer make me such pretty speeches!"

The Reverend Daniel promptly reflected that, when he was married, he was not likely to waste much time squatting on the floor like a journeyman tailor at his Maria's feet; but courtship, as he was well aware, brings its own appointed duties.

"Cruel, cruel angel!" he exclaimed, tragically; "already you begin to doubt my devotion!"

"Never, my dearest love—do not suspect your own Maria! It is my exquisite sensitiveness that leads me for one moment astray. Doubt you, my love!—you that are the kindred soul so long sought for in vain by this widowed lonely heart!"

And here Mrs. Blair, dropping the ball of wool, melted into gentle tearless sobs behind her lace handkerchief; upon which Mr. Lamplough joyfully seized the opportunity of releasing his cramped legs from their aching posture, and rising from the ground with difficulty, by holding on to the corner of the table, he landed himself safely upon the sofa by his Maria's side, where he proceeded to clasp her somewhat shrinking form to the rumped and not altogether spotless shirt-front which veiled his manly bosom.

It was at this critical moment in the proceedings of these fond lovers, that an intruding shadow suddenly darkened the window.

With a little scream, Mrs. Blair pushed back her lover.

"We are watched, Daniel!" she cried; "for heaven's sake, leave me!"

The Reverend Daniel had also caught sight of the interloping somebody outside, and was not slow to take the hint. It was all very well to act the adoring lover in strict

privacy with this charming widow, but he had no fancy for making himself ridiculous before a third person. With a sudden bound, he sprang to the door; and when Juliet Travers, pushing aside the muslin curtains, stepped in through the long French window, she caught sight of a pair of black legs flying precipitately through the door.

It did not strike her that she had come in at an inopportune moment. It could not have been Higgs, of course, who had bolted in so undignified a manner; and it only vaguely crossed her mind that Mrs. Blair's visitor, whoever he might be, had an unpleasantly rough manner of slamming the door behind him.

Mrs. Blair, at the sudden appearance of her stepdaughter, jumped up with a little cry of genuine astonishment.

"My dearest Juliet, how you made me start. I could not think who it was. What made you come in that way? and what has brought you down to-day? and why did you not write, my darling girl? and, dear me! you must have walked from the station—and in all this heat!"

"Yes, I walked—" answered Juliet, quietly, as she threw down her hat and sunshade upon the table. "I had something to say to you, Mrs. Blair—something that could not well be written; so I thought it best to come down myself."

"Have you, dearest Juliet? but you will have something to eat first? surely you must want something after your journey—a cup of tea or a little claret, at all events, to cool you?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Blair," answered Juliet, laying her hand on her stepmother's arm as she was rising to ring the bell; "do not ring for anything—I shall have the carriage to take me on to Broadley to lunch as soon as I have said what I have to say to you. I want nothing but your attention for a few minutes."

Something in Juliet's manner suddenly filled Mrs. Blair with a vague apprehension.

"Dear me!" she said, with a little nervous laugh; "what can you have to say to me, Juliet? I am sure I am delighted to listen to anything that you have to say; but is it so very important, that you cannot even rest and have some luncheon first?"

"Yes, it is very important," answered Juliet, gravely. And then for a minute she was silent, standing looking sternly down

upon the woman who had wronged her so deeply and so remorselessly.

Mrs. Blair had turned a little pale under her rouge, and her heart was thumping in a manner very unusual to her. She could not meet her stepdaughter's eye, but sat fidgeting nervously with the pink ribbon bows on the front of her dress.

"I have seen Ernestine," began Juliet. A sudden sense of relief sent the blood back into Mrs. Blair's face.

"O my dear Juliet," she said, with alacrity, "I know that you have come to plead with me about that poor misguided girl! I see she has been to you with some tale about my cruelty and harshness in sending her away so suddenly; it is just like your goodness and charity of heart to take her part and to come down to plead for her—and of course it *does* sound rather severe, I admit, after so many years, to send her off at a day's notice; but if you heard all the rights of it, and my version of the story, I think you would agree with me that I have done perfectly right in sending her away—such a flighty untrustworthy wretch as she has turned out, and has been giving herself such airs—impertinence to my visitors, and Heaven knows what besides!"

"You are mistaken," answered Juliet, quietly; "it is not about your dismissal of your maid that I came to speak. Whatever I may or may not think of your sending her away so suddenly, you had a perfect right to do so, and I should not dream of interfering with or questioning your arrangements. No, Mrs. Blair, it is not of your maid's dismissal, but of something which she told me that I have to speak to you."

Again the color fled from Mrs. Blair's cheeks.

"Something she told you!" she repeated, blankly.

"There was a letter," said Juliet, "a letter which should have been received by me five years ago—that letter is now, or was until yesterday, in Ernestine's possession. Mrs. Blair, I have come to ask you why that letter never reached me?"

"A letter?—I cannot think what you mean! What have I to do with Ernestine's letters? what on earth do you suppose that I am likely to know about it?" faltered Mrs. Blair; whilst there flashed rapidly through her mind the recollection of all that had happened on the morning of the arrival of that letter she had destroyed.

As distinctly as if it had been yesterday she remembered tearing it in half upon her maid's sudden entrance, and then throwing it into the fire. No, there could not be a doubt of its destruction—she remembered well how the bright flames had danced up and licked up the white paper in a second, and how the charred and blackened fragments had fluttered with the smoke up into the chimney. It was as plain before her eyes as if she could see it now. The letter had most assuredly been utterly destroyed. Ernestine might have guessed at the story and raked it up out of revenge, but she could have no possible proof—and who would believe the word of a discarded servant against that of her mistress? She might (putting together the fact of her fetching the bag and seeing the blazing letter) have got hold of the truth, but it was quite impossible that she could bring forward any evidence to support her accusation; therefore Mrs. Blair rapidly decided that her best and safest plan was to brazen it out and to deny it utterly.

"I really cannot think what you are talking about, Juliet," she said, in well-feigned bewilderment. "You look at me in such a strange manner—you seem almost to be accusing me of something!" she added, with a nervous laugh.

"I do accuse you of something; I accuse you of intercepting and destroying a letter addressed to me by Colonel Fleming just before he went away to India!"

"Juliet, you positively insult me! what can you mean? I intercept a letter, indeed! I interfere with another person's correspondence! What on earth do you take me for? I never was so insulted in my life!" And Mrs. Blair's voice actually quivered with the impetuous force of her righteous indignation.

"Then how do you account for this?" said Juliet, unfastening her pocket-book and holding out to her the torn letter which Ernestine had brought her. "This, Mrs. Blair, your maid found in the lining of a dress which you had given her!"

Mrs. Blair stared blankly and speechlessly at the fragment in Juliet's hand; she recognized the letter immediately, but the sight of it filled her with utter amazement. How on earth did Ernestine get hold of it? for of course she knew at once that the dress story was a fabrication.

"I know nothing of it," she faltered at

last; "I never saw it before; it must have been Ernestine's doing entirely."

"What motive could Ernestine have had?" exclaimed Juliet, impatiently. "Mrs. Blair, do not take the trouble to deny what is as plain as daylight. You knew that I expected a letter from Colonel Fleming, for I had told you that he was going to write to me. You watched for it and intercepted it; how it came into your maid's possession I neither know nor care; but I do know that you—and you alone—stole my letter."

Then Mrs. Blair, driven from her last entrenchment, burst into tears. "I did it for the best, Juliet—indeed, indeed I did. I was so afraid you would be led into making an imprudent match. I only wished for your happiness."

"My happiness!" repeated her step-daughter, scornfully. "You did not think much of my happiness, I fancy. All you wanted was your own selfish ends and your own cruel revenge on a girl whom you always hated and envied."

"Dearest Juliet, do not speak so! Pray believe me—I meant it for the best, I did indeed!" And Mrs. Blair sobbed and wrung her hands, and looked the picture of woe.

"And do you know what your 'best' has done for me?" answered Juliet, in a low concentrated voice; "do you know that you have ruined my happiness and embittered my soul? do you know that you have spoilt two lives, his and mine? Remember that, if evil were to come of it, it would be your fault—lie at your door; and bitterest curses would fall upon your head."

"Juliet, Juliet, spare me!" cried the unhappy Mrs. Blair, covering her ears with both her hands.

"What had I done—" continued Juliet, bitterly and wildly; "good heavens! what had I done to you, that you should have punished me so cruelly? What in the whole course of my life had I been guilty of to deserve such a terrible retaliation? Had you not lived under my roof, been fed at my expense, been treated in my house with all due honor and respect as my father's widow? Are you not human, have you no womanly pity, that you were not able to stop short of breaking my heart! How could you do it! Good God! woman, how could you do it!"

She flung up her hands in a paroxysm of despair, whilst tears hot and bitter welled up suddenly into her eyes.

At the sight of her stepdaughter's emotion Mrs. Blair recovered her presence of mind.

For one moment, in her utter discomfiture, she had sobbed and prayed, and owned herself to be guilty; but she soon began shrewdly to perceive that it would never answer for her to be too humble or too penitent.

The worst was over. Juliet, it is true, knew of her treachery and baseness, but she was not likely to betray that knowledge to others. After all, the cards were still in her own hands, for Juliet's secret was in her possession. She was a married woman, and she loved another man—here to her very face she had acknowledged it! what a hold such a confession gave Mrs. Blair over her stepdaughter!

Drawing herself up with a look of virtuous horror, Mrs. Blair addressed her stepdaughter in an altered voice.

"Juliet, I am amazed at you. Whatever my faults may have been—and I confess that I am sorry now for what was simply an error of judgment, caused by over-anxiety for your happiness and welfare—whatever mistake I may have committed, I have at all events never lost sight of the decencies, I may say, the moralities of life. But can I believe my ears, that you, a married woman, the wife of Cecil Travers, have the audacity to confess to me, your father's widow—a pure-minded, virtuous woman—to own to me with your own lips that you love another man who is not your husband?"

"Silence, woman!" cried Juliet, starting from her seat, and crimsoning with anger to the very roots of her hair; "how dare you say such words! what is it to you whom I love or whom I don't love?"

"I am disgusted—simply disgusted!" said the widow, turning away and waving her scented handkerchief before her face, as if the thought of Juliet's iniquities made her feel faint.

Juliet stifled down her anger and laughed a short bitter laugh.

"You will probably be still more disgusted at what I have to say further to you, Mrs. Blair," she said, scornfully. "You have made my house your home for several years—I do not care that you should do so any longer. As soon as it is convenient to you, I shall be much obliged if you will find another abode. I do not wish to hustle you out with unkind haste, but my house is,

after your insulting words and your wicked conduct to me, no longer fitted to be your home."

Mrs. Blair turned livid with rage. She was silent for a minute, and then, with a sudden smile of triumph, she got up and made her stepdaughter a sweeping curtsey.

"Very much obliged to you, Mrs. Travers, I am sure! Your revenge is very nicely aimed, certainly; only, unfortunately, it has no power to wound me. I was on the point of telling you that I no longer require the kind shelter of your house, which I should in any case have left altogether in a few months—to oblige you, I will make it a few weeks. But as I am going to be married very shortly, and have a house of my own in London, I am fortunately quite independent of the charitable tender mercies of my stepdaughter."

"To be married!" gasped Juliet, in amazement.

"Yes—very wonderful, of course," said the widow, smiling, and fanning herself with great *sang-froid*. "Wonderful, of course, but nevertheless true. My future husband is the eminent divine the Reverend Daniel Lamplough, who has a nice house in Eccleston Street. I dare say I can hurry on my marriage to oblige you, Juliet, and turn out of Sotherne in about five or six weeks. Have you anything else to say to me?"

No, Juliet had nothing else to say. In truth, she was so much astounded at this unexpected piece of news, that she forgot all her anger in blank bewildered amazement.

She could only take her leave shortly and coldly, and depart by the way she came; whilst Mrs. Blair, triumphant to the last, laughed a scornful laugh of victory as her adversary went out.

"I had the best of it there, I think!" she said aloud, as soon as Juliet was out of hearing.

And there is no denying it; she *had* very much the best of it. Juliet had been out-trumped!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FLOBA.

ON that same morning Broadley House lay full in the midsummer sunshine, whilst its master sat out on the lawn under the shadow of a spreading walnut tree.

The house was to the full as untidy and dilapidated-looking as of old. There had been no money spent upon house-painters and decorators since the days when little Georgie was the ruling spirit in it and the squire kept the hounds.

What the old man called a "lick of paint" had indeed been patched on here and there, just to keep body and soul together, as it were, in the rambling old house; but there had been no thorough overhauling and doing-up of the doors and windows, no repapering of the rooms, no resuscitation of the cracked yellow plaster and stucco, such as undoubtedly the whole place required in every part.

Neither was the garden any better kept and tended than of yore. The evergreens had grown up long and straggly, and, for want of being regularly clipped, had become weedy and thin-looking near their roots; the borders were a tangled mixture of flowers and weeds, with, if anything, a predominance of the latter; whilst the lawn was badly mown and scratched up by the swarm of chickens and dogs which strayed all day long unreprieved over it.

They none of them cared for these things at Broadley. Mrs. Travers, indeed, sometimes fretted unavailingly over the untidiness and disorder of her surroundings, and pleaded for another gardener, and suggested the ejection of the live-stock from before the drawing-room windows; but the squire would only grumble savagely—"Another gardener! pray where's the money to come from, ma'am?" whilst Flora regarded the notion of exiling the dogs from any portion of the domain with such indignant horror, that Mrs. Travers, being quite in the minority, had to smother her remonstrances into an aggrieved and snubbed silence.

Squire Travers sits in a low chair under the walnut tree, dressed in a sort of East-Indian planter's costume of nankeen-colored cotton, with a straw hat on the ground behind him, his spectacles on his nose, and "The Field" on his knees.

Flat on her back on the grass in front of him lies his daughter Flora—her arms stretched up behind her blonde shiny head, and her gray eyes looking sleepily up at her father from beneath their long dark lashes. Her lithe young figure, in its close-fitting pink cotton dress, gathered in by a simple leather belt at her slender waist, is shown off to full advantage by the abandon and

ease of her attitude. Two fox terriers and a collie puppy at its most riotous age are tumbling and chasing each other with boisterous mirth round and round her recumbent form, without in any way disturbing her tranquillity; and a whole brood of soft white fluffy chickens, with their solemnly clucking mother at their head, are pecketing their way over the grass not a couple of yards from her head.

Flora has been dozing, but she is wide awake now, and she is wondering when on earth her father will have finished that article on salmon culture in "The Field."

"He can't find it so very absorbing," she said to herself; "why doesn't he talk to me instead?" for Miss Flora was a chatterbox, and found enforced silence very hard to bear.

"Papa!" she said, at last, seeing that the salmon culture had been gone through, and a page on cricket-matches just turned to.

"Yes, my love?"

"Papa, that's the third small red spider I've watched come down straight on the top of your dear old bald head."

"Bless my soul! you don't say so, Flora!" said the squire, nervously, putting up his hand to rub his head, and dropping "The Field" as he did so.

Flora laughed. "All rubbish, papa—I only wanted you to stop reading! I'm not going to let you have 'The Field' again." And she took possession of the fallen paper, and placed it safely out of his reach under her own head.

"Now talk to me, papa."

"Talk! bless the child! what is there to talk of out of the hunting season?"

"Why, there's Ve-per's new litter, and Jock's distemper, and whether my mare is to be turned out to grass—and, good gracious, papa," with a little scornful impatience. "can you talk of nothing else but the dogs and horses?"

The squire rubbed his chin thoughtfully—what did the child want to talk about? he wondered. Georgie had never wished for any more exalted topic of conversation.

"I thought you were so fond of the horses and dogs," he said, reproachfully, looking at his younger daughter.

"So I am, the darlings, I love them!" said Flora, catching at one of the fox terriers as he bounded over her, and kissing his brown head rapturously ere she released his struggling kicking body.

"So I am, of course; but they are dull to talk about. Do you know of what I have been thinking for the last quarter of an hour?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, look up into the tree above you," she said, casting up her clear gray eyes as she spoke; "look right up into it. Do you see how the branches all bend out from the trunk in regular curves, and how all the leaves lie one over another in a sort of vaulted roof?"—and listen, papa, to the sort of murmur the voices of the birds make high up above there: do you remember when we went into Wells Cathedral once, when the choristers were practising somewhere out of sight—and we stared up at the roof till the sound seemed to come from there like angels' voices—don't you remember how lovely it was? Now, doesn't looking up into the walnut tree remind you of the roof of Wells Cathedral, papa?"

Mr. Travers had done as he was told, and leaned his neck back till it ached, to look straight above his head. He listened attentively to all his daughter said, and then looked down again at her with a puzzled bewildered face. What could he possibly make of a girl who said a tree was like a cathedral?

"Upon my soul, Flora, I suppose I am very stupid," he said, almost humbly; "but I don't see how a green tree can be like Wells Cathedral!"

"Don't you, papa? O, I see it so plainly," she answered, with her eyes still above his head, continuing the drift of her own fanciful imaginations. "I can see all the frettings and carvings of the groined roof, and the capitals of the columns with leaves, and berries, and arabesques, and there is one little grinning demon's head, yes, and there is another, and another too—those are the bosses, and then a whole legion of little saints and fiends mixed up together under that arch—ah! cruel little puff of wind! it has blown them all away."

The squire had looked up again, half fancying the things must be there, since Flora saw them, and angry at his own stupidity for not doing so too, and then he looked down again at her in perplexity.

"What queer things the child has got in her head," he said, half to himself. "Is it from Wattie, I wonder, that you've got all these crazy notions, Miss Flora?"

A faint flush swept over the girl's face as

her father spoke, and she half raised herself from the ground.

"Never mind all the nonsense I talk, papa. I like saying aloud all the odd things that come into my head—perhaps I ought not to expect you to understand—but hush! is not that the sound of carriage wheels coming up the drive? Yes, it is a carriage; fancy visitors at this hour in the morning—why, papa!" springing up gladly, "it is the Sotherne carriage, and there is Juliet inside it." And she ran eagerly forward, whilst the squire, stooping to pick up his "Field" and his straw hat, followed her more leisurely.

"There must be something wrong in the head of a child that sees cathedrals up in the trees," he said to himself again, with a puzzled pucker on his old forehead.

"Anything wrong with Cis—is my dear boy ill?" cried Mrs. Travers, coming anxiously out of the front door to meet her daughter-in-law.

Mothers-in-law have a way of thinking that nothing else on earth can occupy the time or thoughts of their sons' wives excepting only those sons, who to the mother are such demi-gods, and to the wife often such very commonplace and faulty personages.

"Nothing is wrong with Cis that I know of," answered Juliet, smiling, as she alighted from the carriage; "he was quite well this morning;" and a little pang went through her heart, at the thought that no one asked or cared whether anything was wrong with her: a pang which, an instant after, she accused herself of foolishness for feeling. "How are you, dear Mrs. Travers? can you spare me Flora? I have come to carry her off. Flora, do you think you can pack up your things and be ready to go back with me in a couple of hours? Never mind if your wardrobe is not quite what it should be—we are not going to a desert; there are plenty of shops in London, you know."

"O Juliet! do you really mean it?" exclaimed the girl, clapping her hands in delight, whilst visions of London, of balls, and theatres, and flower-shows, dreamt of often but never experienced, flashed through her mind and flushed her fair young face with a bright rose tint.

"Flora is too young to go out in London," said her mother—"a child not seventeen yet."

"Indeed, mamma, I am!" interrupted

the girl, eagerly; "I was seventeen last Monday—don't you remember? O, do let me go!"

"I think she had much better stay at home. I have no opinion of turning girls' heads with vanity and frivolity, before they are out of the schoolroom," said the mother, severely.

But the father was thinking of the cathedral up in the walnut tree. High time something should be done to drive such fanciful notions out of the child's mind!

"Let her go, let her go," he said. "What is life to a girl out of the hunting season, with no one but a couple of old folks to talk to? She only gets a pack of nonsense and poetry into her head. You may go with your sister-in-law, my dear; go and pack up your frocks: and, Juliet, come in and have some lunch."

Mrs. Travers sighed resignedly, as Flora executed a pirouette of delight, and fled indoors with her face all aglow with pleasure to pack up "her frocks."

So Juliet carried off her young sister-in-law to Grosvenor Street. Was it, perhaps, that she needed that pure young presence to defend her against herself?—that she dreaded to return alone to all the storms and temptations of her life—that she required a companion, some one to be with her and stand by her daily, a some one who should be quite a different sort of person from Rosa Dalmaine?

Possibly, for with the events of the last two days there had grown up a great terror in Juliet Travers's heart, a mortal fear, a terrible dread of herself. Whilst she had believed that she was unloved and forgotten, she had been indeed miserable, but she had been safe; but with the knowledge which the discovery of that old letter had brought her, that she was not unloved, not scorned, not forgotten, every safeguard of pride and duty behind which she had formerly entrenched herself seemed to be crumbling away.

By the very joy that the knowledge of Hugh Fleming's love gave her, she realized the greatness of her danger. And now her secret was no longer her own—to her very face her enemy, the woman whose selfish cruelty had already ruined her life, had accused her of loving a man not her husband, and had worded her accusation in coarse uncompromising words, that had possibly scared and terrified her more than all her

own most heart-searching thoughts. As this woman had wrecked her past, might she not also equally wreck her future?

With a shudder of terror, she turned eagerly from her own thoughts, with a certain sense of security, to the girl who sat beside her in the railway carriage, and who was chattering gayly of the unknown pleasures and delights which London can contain for sorrowless seventeen.

Flora was in fairy-land. The fields, and woods, and villages, as they flew by in the deepening summer twilight, seemed to her a flower-bordered pathway, that was to lead her to the summit of all her dreams.

She had never been to London before, excepting for an occasional day's shopping, usually including a visit to the dentist, of which she had anything but pleasant reminiscences, and she never had been to a ball in her life. Flora was neither worldly nor frivolous, but she had that craving for enjoyment and pleasure which all young girls naturally possess, and which is so often unwisely checked and smothered away as a sin by mothers who believe themselves to be honestly doing their duty, but who seem to have entirely forgotten their own young days.

Why, in the name of all that is innocent and good, should not girls enjoy to the utmost their first heyday of youth, when they are heart-whole and frolicsome as the young lambs in the cowslip-covered fields? God knows that heart-burnings, and disappointments, and weariness of mind, come soon enough to most women!

And beyond and above this natural pleasure and excitement in the change that had come into her life, there was hidden away somewhere in the depths of Flora's heart a certain joyous delight in the thought of something very specially happy, which might in all probability come across her path in London.

Now, this something had a tangible name—and the name of it was Walter Ellison.

Flora Travers was not at all "in love" with our old friend Wattie; at least, if you had accused her of such a thing, she would have laughed at you. Wattie was to her as an elder brother, a home authority, a somebody to be at times teased and lorded over, and at other times admiringly listened to and meekly obeyed. She had had very little sisterly intercourse with her own brother—indeed, she knew very little of him at all;

and the little she did know was so uncongenial to her own nature, that she could hardly be said to be fond of him.

But in Wattie, Flora had realized, as she thought, all her notions of fraternal affection, and perhaps a something more besides of which she was hardly aware.

When he came down to Broadley from Saturday to Monday, an event which had happened less often now than in the first years after poor Georgie's death, Flora ran gladly to meet him at the front door, which in opening to admit his handsome figure seemed to her to let in a flood of life and sunshine along with it.

When he talked to her she listened to him patiently, when he lent her books she devoured them eagerly; but when, as frequently happened, he gave her gentle fraternal scoldings and wise little bits of advice, she laughed at him scornfully, and told him to mind his own business, and then after he was gone repented in tears, and strove to do all he wished.

And Wattie loved the girl with all his heart and soul; not as he had loved Georgie, with the fervor and passion of a boy's first love, but soberly and gravely, and none the less deeply that he had hitherto entirely suppressed every outward demonstration of it.

This transferring of his heart from his dead first love to her young sister was not done all in a minute.

Wattie had been attracted to her first because of the reflected light of his affection to Georgie, because she was so heart-broken at her death, and perhaps still more because of her great personal likeness to her sister. But by degrees, as time went on, he grew to love her for herself alone, and to love her with a totally different and distinct love from that he had felt for Georgie.

Not for her sweetness, or gentleness, or unselfishness could any one love Flora Travers. None of these things had she in common with Georgie; their love of riding and of all healthy outdoor occupations, and their fair shining hair alone, had made the sisters alike.

Flora was willful, and self-indulgent, and spoilt, as only the younger child of a doting old father can be. She asserted her own opinions, spoke out her own views, contradicted her elders, and laughed at them to their faces, with a boldness which horrified

Wattie, whilst at the same time it attracted him strangely.

She was so saucy, and so conscious of her own power, and so pretty with it all, that it would have required a stronger minded man than Wattie to have resisted her. And then Flora had a serious side to her volatile nature, a vivid imagination, a refined mind, and the warmest heart in the world.

Walter Ellison was no longer the impetuous lover who had wooed poor Georgie five years ago. He knew very well that the squire would as joyfully give him his younger daughter, as he had jealously withheld the elder from him in days gone by. But Wattie did not mean to take advantage of that knowledge. The child should not be taken unawares; she should have time to look about her, and see other men, and learn her own heart thoroughly before he asked her for it. Meanwhile Wattie stuck to the Bar and worked in earnest. He had long ago given up the idea of rising to fame and fortune by the pursuit of the Fine Arts, and opportunity having on one occasion given him a brief with which he had made a slight success, he buckled down bravely to court the legal muse, and by this time was earning a small but steadily increasing income by his untiring energy and perseverance.

He did not go down very often to Broadley now. He fancied that the squire's hints, and nods, and winks had made Flora slightly conscious and confused in his presence, and he did not want her to be driven into considering him as a lover, or even as an admirer, by the well-meant insinuations of anybody.

If she loved him, she must do so of her own accord, he said to himself, or else not at all.

And yet, all the time he plodded away at his daily work, he was not constantly thinking that he was working and toiling for her. Indirectly, for her—yes, if she would have him; but if not, then for himself.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FLORA IN LONDON.

THE whirl of London life went on—diners, balls, evening parties all night, flower-shows, afternoon parties, visits, and shops all day—and no one among all the gay crowd of matrons and maids caught the

spirit of the life more quickly, or entered more thoroughly into every passing pleasure, than did our little friend Flora Travers.

In three weeks Flora had developed from a girl into a woman; the hotbed life of London excitement drew out of her things that had before lain dormant within her, and which it would have taken years of the quiet humdrum existence of Broadley House to have brought to light.

For in three weeks she had learnt the secret of her own attractiveness. She had gone to her first ball with a thousand tremors and misgivings. As she had followed Juliet up the flower-bedecked staircase, and had encountered all the gay couples of men and women coming down it—a quadrille was just over—talking, and laughing, and nodding to each other with the ease of perfect confidence in themselves and in their own enjoyment, her beating heart had sunk down in dismay.

She knew no one. Was it likely that she would get any partners? Who would care to dance with a girl so young and so ignorant of everything connected with London life as she was? And to sit still and watch other girls dance and enjoy themselves was, Flora felt, more than the fortitude of seventeen could bear. She knew she should disgrace herself and cry. O, how heartily she longed to be able to turn back and fly down that bright thronged staircase, jump into the dark carriage again, and be carried home to bed before the dreadful misery which she anticipated should overtake her!

And then, just as these agonized thoughts were at their climax, somebody introduced her to her first partner:

"Miss Travers, let me introduce Captain Hartley."

And an unknown somebody, whom she had not courage to look up at, straightway whirled her away in his arms.

Jack Hartley was wondering what on earth he should say to his partner. The lady of the house had asked him if he minded dancing with a very young girl, who knew nobody; and Jack, who was good-natured, pulled a grimace and submitted to be victimized.

"She is pretty, at all events," was his first thought, adding, after a dozen steps or so down the room, "and dances well, too, by Jove! Well, I'd better keep her at it, for I suppose she can't say a word."

And keep her at it he did, until his own

breath was utterly gone, and he had to come to a stop to recruit it, whilst Flora stood fresh and cool as a summer flower by his side.

"Well, I must say something to her," thought Jack, when his violent panting was somewhat abated, "so here goes for the Row or the Royal Academy for the nine hundred and sixteenth time this week!" And he was just clearing his throat to open fire upon these interesting topics when a clear sweet voice by his side said:

"I am afraid you will find me very stupid."

"Stupid!" said Jack, opening his blue eyes in amazement, but feeling rather guilty the while; "what an extraordinary ideal what can make you think so?"

"Girls are always considered stupid when they are quite young. I know you were cudgelling your brains to think of something civil to say to me."

"What a witch you are!" said Jack, laughing at being so cleverly found out, and beginning to notice that his companion was even more than pretty. "Well, I won't deny the soft impeachment; but I see now that I was blind—you are not like ordinary girls at all."

"Perhaps not," said Flora, lowering her glance a little under her partner's admiring gaze, "but this is my first ball."

"Everybody must have a beginning," said Captain Hartley, with reassuring condescension. "So it is your first ball, is it? Well, and how do you like it?"

"O, not at all, as yet," said Flora, with ingenuous earnestness.

Jack Hartley burst out laughing. "Upon my word, Miss Travers, you are not complimentary, considering that I am 'as yet' your only partner!"

"That is just it—I mean," correcting herself with a blush, "I don't mean to be rude, of course—but it is because you are my only partner. I know you will be the only one," she added, looking melancholy.

"Do you mean that I am to dance with you the whole evening?" said Jack, more and more amused.

"O no, no! how very stupid you are!" cried Flora, quite distressed; "no, I mean of course that no one else will."

"Why on earth should you imagine that such an awful state of imbecility is going to befall the whole of the male sex here present?"

"Because I am seventeen, and I don't know a single soul in the room," answered the girl, with a demure solemnity that was almost tragic.

Jack laughed heartily as he passed his arm round her waist, and as he carried her off again among the dancers he whispered, with his long mustache almost brushing against her smooth fair plaits:

"You little goose, you dance divinely; you are lovely, and, better still, you know how to flirt already. Take my word for it, before the end of the evening you will be queen of the room."

And he was right. Before the evening was over Flora had more partners than she knew what to do with, and was lording it over them with all the saucy impudence of a young sovereign.

It is little to be wondered at that in three weeks' time there was no longer only one man reigning supreme in Flora Travers's imagination.

Wattie Ellison was no more the dominant influence of her life. Instead of him, dozens of young men of all shades and kinds hustled and jostled each other through her thoughts night and day, one succeeding the other with surprising rapidity. Captain Hartley, with his blue eyes and long mustache, and with the privileged freedom of old friendship which that little talk at her first ball had empowered him to assume, was perhaps the foremost and most constant on her list of admirers—at all events, he attracted her fancy and touched her vanity more than did any of the others.

Captain Hartley was a young man who understood women and the art of pleasing them thoroughly. He had studied them at all ages and in all moods from his boyhood upwards; he understood when to pursue them and when to stand aloof, when to cajole and when to appear indifferent, when to gaze with bold admiration and when to glance covertly with feigned timidity—he could be humble with them at times; but, above all, he knew when and how to be audacious; for what woman at heart is not attracted by audacity, though she must perforce feign to resent it? "Faint heart never won fair lady," is the truest proverb that ever was written concerning the much hackneyed subject of love-making. In a word, Jack Hartley was a finished flirt; moreover, he was a cavalry officer, in a crack Lancer regiment, and Flora was at

that age when the military element makes a profound impression on the female imagination. When one morning she had been taken down to some field-day at Aldershot, and had seen him trot by at the head of his troop, a brilliant vision of blue cloth and gold lace and shining accoutrements glittering in the sunshine, little Flora gave in at once, and believed herself, for that day at least, to be really and truly desperately in love with the fascinating captain.

Meanwhile, Wattie Ellison was not unmindful of what was going on, but he knew the child better than she knew herself.

He had met her at several balls, and, although he had never danced himself since the death of his first love, he had been partly pleased and partly pained to stand aside in some sheltering doorway to watch Flora.

He was pleased that she was so happy and so much admired, and to see her looking so lovely; but he was pained to note how much all the admiration and flattery engrossed her, and to see how little part he himself had in her present life. Especially did he dislike the very decided flirtation which Flora was carrying on with handsome Jack Hartley. Wattie well knew that Jack was the kind of man who never meant anything serious by attentions to young ladies, and he was terribly afraid lest Flora should allow herself to get too fond of the handsome lancer. He wondered that Juliet did not see and guard against the danger for her young sister-in-law; but Juliet, although she zealously performed all the arduous duties of chaperone, was possibly too much engrossed by her own troubles to notice very particularly how often Flora danced or sat out with one partner; and as long as the girl was well dressed and enjoying herself, she did not, perhaps, think her supervision over her need go further.

One evening, it was a day or two before the Eton and Harrow cricket-match, Juliet and Flora were together in a box at the opera; for the moment no one was with them, and the curtain had gone down for the first act. The house was crowded, and they were both looking down at the glittering *parterre* of the stalls below them.

"Look, Juliet, at that fat old woman in a pink silk turban—did you ever see such an object?" said Flora, peering down through her opera-glasses. "Why, I do declare it's old Mrs. Rollick! I never saw

her come out in that style before—and there is Arabella with her, in a low white tarlatan dress. Well, if I was thirty, with a scraggy neck and a couple of broomsticks for arms, I wouldn't appear in a low dress like that!" she added, with all the severity and disgust which the consciousness of undeniable youth and beauty can give.

"You are seventeen, and have pretty little plump shoulders," said Juliet, smiling. "If you are unmarried at thirty, and have grown scraggy—"

"H!" interrupted Flora, with a scornful little toss of her pretty chin.

Juliet laughed, and then sighed. She too had been looking eagerly down amongst the crowd below them—longing and yearning for a sight of Hugh Fleming.

Since that day when the truth about that old letter had been spoken between them, he had not once been to her house, and she had only twice seen him, once in a crowded ballroom, and once out of doors. On both occasions merely a bow had passed between them.

She was perfectly conscious that he kept aloof from her purposely; and although she fully appreciated his motives and honored him for them, and though she acknowledged the wisdom of his avoiding her for both their sakes, yet, womanlike, she could not help reproaching him, and fretted angrily against his desertion.

"If he loved me more, he could not keep away," she said to herself, whereas in her heart she knew that it was the very greatness of his love which made him keep away.

"There is Wattie," said Juliet, looking down through her opera-glasses.

"Yes, I see," said Flora, as if she did not care at all, although she had seen him a long time ago.

And presently Wattie came up into their box.

"What is this about your going to Lord's on Friday?" he said, sitting down by Flora, with perhaps a little too much of the elder brother in his tone.

"What about it?" said Flora, defiantly, scenting opposition before it came.

"Why, I hear you are going on the drag of the 99th Lancers. I hope you won't think of it, Flora—and without your sister-in-law, too."

"Not think of it, indeed! As if I was going to give it up! Why on earth should I

not go? I am going to be chaperoned by two married women, Mrs. Dalmaine and the colonel's wife. You talk as if I was going off all by myself on the sly. Juliet has given me leave to go, haven't you, Juliet?"

"Given you leave to go where, Flora?" asked Juliet, rousing herself with an effort as the girl turned eagerly to her.

"I was objecting to Flora's going by herself to the cricket-match on the 99th drag, Mrs. Travers," put in Wattie.

"Mrs. Dalmaine is going to take her; I have been engaged myself long ago to go to Lady Caroline Skinfint's carriage, and I did not see how Flora was to go at all, so I was rather glad when she got such a pleasant invitation—how do you do, Lord George?" she added, turning to Lord George Mannersley, who at that moment entered the box and sat down beside her.

Flora turned triumphantly to Wattie.

"There!" she said, "you see Juliet does not mind my going."

"But I do very much, Flora; if you will give it up to please me, I will take you myself."

"How?" she said, temporizing a little.

"I will call for you in a hansom directly after lunch and take you up."

"After lunch! well, and when there what should we do?"

"Why, walk about," said Wattie, a little doubtfully, conscious possibly that his plan was hardly an equivalent for the 99th drag and the champagne luncheon.

"Thank you, sir," said Flora, with a toss of her head, "I prefer my own arrangements."

At that moment Captain Hartley came into the box.

"I have just looked in, Miss Travers, in case I don't see you before Friday, to say that I will call for you in my phaeton, if that is not too early. Mrs. Dalmaine will wait for you inside the door—I have just seen her—will that suit you?"

"O, perfectly, thank you, Captain Hartley; it will be delightful!" cried Flora, with a little more *empressement* in her tone than if Wattie had not been standing behind her chair.

"Very well, then, let us settle it so. We have nothing to do now but hope for fine weather; and of course, Miss Travers, you will wear Eton colors?"

"I will see about that," said Flora, who

had a new pale-blue bonnet just come home from the milliner's on purpose.

Jack Hartley bent over her chair and whispered something to her which Wattie did not hear.

She looked down, smiled, fidgeted with her fan, and then looked up with a sudden flash of her gray eyes into his.

"Well, for *your* sake I will try," she said, sentimentally.

Wattie ground his teeth together in a fury, whilst Captain Hartley, looking perhaps a little surprised at her manner, took his leave of both ladies.

"Good-night," said Wattie, shortly, immediately after, and went out without shaking hands, with a face like a thunder-cloud.

And Flora pretended to listen to Patti, and felt a good deal elated by her small triumph, and a little bit sorry too.

What Jack Hartley had whispered to her had been very innocent indeed.

"That dreadful Rollick woman and her daughter have just been asking me to give them lunch on our drag at Lord's. I wish you would tell them the wheels are rotten and will give way, or something alarming; do try and keep them away," was what he had said. And Flora's words had answered him perfectly; but her manner had, been intended to make Wattie believe that something sentimental had been said about the Eton colors, for she did not forget that Wattie was a Harrow man.

Old or young, fair or plain, in their dealings with men who love them, women are at heart all the same. Only the different circumstances of their lives make the different shades of their character in this respect.

Down at Broadley House, among the horses and dogs, and under the shady walnut trees on the lawn, no little maid had been more simple-hearted and more free from every shade of coquetry than was Flora Travers; but up in London, courted and flattered, and sought after, she had already learnt all the thousand and one trickeries by which a woman exasperates an honest lover to the verge of despair, and often half breaks her own heart by the way. What can be the pleasure of it?

The natural feminine result of Miss Flora's naughtiness was that she lay awake crying all night; and had Wattie only come again in the morning, she would have given

up the cricket-match without a pang. But Wattie did not dream of coming.

Flora was in the depths of penitence—she would at all events do something to show her good intentions.

"Juliet," she said, diplomatically, "that bonnet is hideous! I really cannot wear it to-morrow. I think that I must change it."

"I thought it suited you so well, Flora; why should you want to change it?"

"I have taken the greatest horror of it. I positively cannot bear the sight of it!"

"You funny child! I liked it so much; but if you wish, we will take it back this afternoon."

And when the two ladies reached the shop with the rejected bonnet, to Juliet's astonishment, Flora insisted on having a dark-blue one.

"Changed your colors, Flora! Why, what is that for?"

"Light blue is horribly unbecoming to me," said Flora, blushing guiltily.

"On the contrary, I think it is dark blue that does not suit you—but please yourself, child," said her sister-in-law, with a smile, becoming aware for the first time of some romance that was taking place in the girl's life.

Flora was trying on a dark-blue bonnet. It did not suit her—her complexion was too pale. She was perfectly conscious of the fact, but stuck to her resolution with the heroism of an early martyr.

"He shall see that I can even make myself look a fright to please him," she thought, and aloud she said, "This one will do very well." The dark-blue bonnet was paid for and carried off, and Flora felt that she had given Wattie every reparation within her power. All day long she longed for him to come, or at least for a note from him. If only he would offer again to take her himself, how gladly she felt she would give up the glories of the 99th drag and the champagne lunch, to say nothing of Captain Hartley's phaeton in the morning, to go with him humbly in a hansom! But Wattie made no sign, and Flora did not feel strong-minded enough to give up the expedition altogether. Towards evening she became angry and impatient with him again.

"He is jealous, simply jealous," she said to herself. "Captain Hartley is much pleasanter, he never makes himself disa-

greeable for nothing. I shall certainly go now. Besides, it is too late to put him off. I almost wish I had not changed the bonnet."

CHAPTER XXX.

A VISIT FROM A BRIDE.

ON a blazing morning, some four or five days before the London world thought it necessary to go mad in light and blue over the schoolboys' cricket-match, a heavily laden four-wheel cab might have been seen drawn up lazily in front of one of the stuccoed porticos in Lower Eccleston Street.

On the top of the cab were two large dress boxes, a portmanteau and a tin box, all marked very strikingly with the letter L in red and white paint. Out of the cab there emerged, when the cabman opened the door, first, a small bird cage containing a canary, secondly, a larger ditto containing a gray parrot, thirdly, a wickerwork dog-kennel containing a Maltese poodle—which latter animal enlivened the noonday tranquillity of the street by uttering sundry dismal and jackal-like howls as soon as he was deposited on the pavement.

After the live stock, were handed out a lady's dressing-case, a gentleman's dressing-bag, a bundle of umbrellas, and a rug; and then came a middle-aged female in a rusty black silk dress, and with a severe cast of countenance, who proceeded to hand out a shapeless bundle of muslin flounces and blue ribbons, who descended cautiously to the ground and looked timidly around her.

"It's very trying for a bride to come home all alone like this, isn't it, Dorcas? And to think of its being broad daylight too, with everybody to stare at me in the open street."

"What is the hey of man?" said the female addressed, sternly fixing her own on the only male observer of the proceedings, a one-legged crossing-sweeper at the corner, who was idly wondering if so many packages would mean "a job;" "the hey of man signifies little, marm; reflect upon the judgment-day when all our sins will be revealed." And it was with those cheerful words sounding in her ears that Mrs. Lamplough passed the threshold of her new home.

Mrs. Blair had not allowed many days to elapse after her stormy interview with her stepdaughter before securing to herself, by

all the strength of marriage bonds, the various good things which she imagined would fall to her lot as the lawful wife of the Rev. Daniel Lamplough.

No sooner had Juliet virtually ejected her from Sotherne than she became possessed with a mortal terror lest her lover, who was now her only refuge, should slip through her fingers also, and she be left destitute and homeless.

With many blushes and much simpering shyness she communicated to her dearest Daniel her wish to be married soon—sooner than she had originally intended—so very soon, indeed, that even that worthy man, who was not troubled with many bashful sentiments, was a little bit surprised.

She was never well at Sotherne in the summer, she said. She wanted an immediate change of air—it fretted her to think she was keeping her Daniel away from his parish and his poor people, who must miss his ministrations so sorely; it would be nice, too, to be married quietly, without any fuss; indeed, in her delicate position, it would be more seemly; and then, they would get a little glimpse of the world before the London season was quite over; and as to her clothes, why, she really wanted very little, and could get everything much better in town after she was married.

Mr. Lamplough was only too pleased at the turn which his courtship was thus suddenly taking. Truth to say, he was getting very tired of the love-making; the lady once secured, he was anxious to get back to his ordinary life, and was thoroughly sick of winding Mrs. Blair's wools and carrying her shawls, and of making her pretty speeches all day long. It was time, he considered, that all these follies should come to an end. A certain amount of philandering he had always known to be requisite and desirable on these occasions, but he was beginning to think that he had had pretty well enough of it, so that he hailed with joy this sudden fancy of hers to be married in a week, and congratulated himself on having found a woman who was sensible enough to forego the extravagant delights of a large trousseau, and who did not mind walking into church arm-in-arm with him, without a wedding party, and without a wedding breakfast.

"My Maria," he said, with that ineffable sweetness which always characterized his language to the lady of his affections, "you

are the fairest ornament of your sex; your goodness and your solicitude for my happiness positively overwhelm me;" and then he hummed and hawed, and said something about the settlements.

As to that, Mrs. Blair said it would be all very easily arranged. She would send for Mr. Bruce, who had always managed her affairs, and he would come down and settle everything, and if Mr. Lamplough would write any directions he might wish to give to him, she would do the same, and he would bring down the necessary documents with him all ready to be signed, so that there need be no delay on that score. And then she added, tenderly:

"And you know, Daniel, that everything I have is yours."

And Mr. Lamplough murmured, "My angel!" with a fondness which was not altogether assumed, considering the circumstances.

But whether it was by accident or by design, certain it is that Mr. Bruce's letter to the bridegroom elect did not give him the least idea of the true state of the case. In all probability Mr. Bruce imagined that the amount of Mrs. Blair's fortune was known to him; at any rate it was only when the family solicitor arrived at Sotherne with the settlements all drawn out in his pocket, the very afternoon before the wedding-day, that Mr. Lamplough found out, to his horror and dismay, that his "rich widow," as he had always fondly imagined her to be, possessed three thousand pounds of her own, and five hundred pounds per annum settled upon her for her lifetime—which upon her death lapsed again to the Sotherne estate, upon which it was chargeable.

Certainly Mrs. Blair had done her utmost for her lover, for her own three thousand pounds were to be settled absolutely upon him. He could find no fault with her; to the best of her power, she had behaved fairly, and even generously, to him; she had not cheated him nor lied unto him, she had never told him she was rich, nor misled him concerning her fortune in any way. It was entirely from the gossip of other people, from the style in which she lived, and from his own misguided suppositions, that this fatal misconception had arisen.

And it was now too late. Mr. Lamplough had no overweening sense of honor, neither was he a man of any refinement of feeling; but to cast off a lady on the very eve of his

marriage-day, because she had not so much money as he had imagined her to have, was a thing which even he felt to be an impossibility.

So Mr. and Mrs. Lamplough were duly married at Sotherne Church the following morning, and the only change in their programme was, that, instead of a week's honeymoon, two days at the Red Lion at Henley, on their way to London, was all that Mr. Lamplough considered necessary under the altered circumstances of his marriage.

Some days before the wedding there arrived from London, as lady's-maid to the bride, a stern-looking middle-aged woman, Mrs. Dorcas Mullins by name. She was engaged and sent down by Miss Lamplough, the Rev. Daniel's maiden sister, with a first-rate character; indeed, she was well known to her, having already lived with several members of the Lamplough family.

Mr. Blair did not fancy the austere and puritanical aspect of the waiting-maid her future sister-in-law had chosen for her; but Mr. Lamplough having stated that she was a God-fearing woman, and came of a pious family, and further that it was his very particular wish that his dearest Maria should engage her, she did not venture to make any more objections to her.

Dorcas was undoubtedly a good servant and understood her duties, so that Mrs. Blair could find no reasonable fault with her, but she felt vaguely that her new maid was a spy upon her actions, and that Mr. Lamplough had chosen her to be a sort of gaoler over her. When the bride and bridegroom arrived at Paddington Station from Henley, Mr. Lamplough said to his wife:

"My love, will you go home with Dorcas?—I have a little business to do in the city, and shall be with you during the course of the afternoon."

His smooth-toned gentle words left no room for rebellion. Mrs. Lamplough felt it hard to be left to go to her new home alone, but already she had learnt that she was no longer a free agent, and that her husband was not a man whom she could dare to disobey, even concerning the smallest trifle.

So, accompanied only by her sour-faced scripture-quoting maid—a sad change from the voluble, worldly little Ernestine, whom her mistress already bitterly regretted—the three-days' wife arrived, as has been seen, at the unknown house of her new husband.

No. 160 Lower Eccleston Street was a large and well-built corner house, but when you went into it you felt much as if you were entering a family vault. Heavy mahogany furniture, black with age, faded flock papers of antediluvian design, dingy threadbare carpets, and curtains out of which the sun had long ago taken every vestige of their original color, and reduced them in every room to a uniform rusty hue; a great gaunt drawing-room, from whose misty ceiling depended a monstrous and hideous chandelier done up in a yellow muslin bag; old-fashioned console tables with white marble tops surmounted by mirrors, whose gilt frames of scrolled and floriated designs were also swathed in yellow muslin; a large round table in the middle of the front drawing-room, another a size smaller in the middle of the back drawing-room, with red Utrecht velvet covers on each of them; a few hard straight-backed sofas and chairs, all in red Utrecht also, scattered at wide intervals over the room; a white alabaster clock, with a blackened ormolu cupid on the top of it, on the mantelpiece, flanked on either side by two large and extremely hideous cut-glass lustres, completed the decorations of this cheerful apartment. The rest of the house was in the same style. All was good indeed, but heavy, ponderous and frightful. There was not a little table, nor a light chair, nor a scrap of prettiness, from the cellar to the garret.

Poor Mrs. Lamplough, who had been accustomed to all the feminine knickknacks of the day in the pretty rooms at Sotheby, looked about her in dismay. Something must of course be done to improve all this; everything ugly must be swept away, and all sorts of new-fashioned things must be substituted—but meanwhile how depressing, how appalling, was the present state of things!

When Mr. Lamplough came home he found the furniture in the drawing-room all dragged about from one side of the room to the other, the yellow muslin torn off the chandelier and the gilt frames of the mirrors, and his wife standing in the midst of the confusion jotting down sundry items with a pencil and paper.

The reverend gentleman stopped in amazement in the doorway.

"My love, what are you doing? Are you pushing up the furniture for a carpet dance; or taking an inventory to let the house?"

"Neither," she answered, a little sharply; "I am only putting down what things I shall want to make this room decently habitable, and what old rubbish must be sold."

"New things!" said Mr. Lamplough, with a little short laugh. "I don't quite know, my dearest Maria, where the new things are to come from. I shall not provide the money for any new thing; do you feel inclined to do so?" It was the first time he had alluded to the lack of money which he so sorely repented in his bride, and, possibly feeling not altogether guiltless of deception in the matter, Mrs. Lamplough bit her lip and was silent.

"Here, Florizella!" he exclaimed, addressing somebody behind him, and for the first time Mrs. Lamplough discovered that he had not come in alone. A great puffing and panting was heard on the last step of the staircase and in the landing outside, and then the individual addressed as "Florizella" waddled, I cannot say walked, into the room.

A short woman, a little more than four feet high, and very nearly as broad as she was tall, a very fat red face, and fierce-looking little brown curls which stuck out stiffly from under a salmon-colored bonnet, very large hands arrayed in gray cotton gloves, and very large feet in black cloth boots that stuck out conspicuously from under her short green silk gown—such was the outer appearance of the woman who answered to the poetical name of Florizella, suggestive of shepherdesses, and flowery meads, and all sorts of summer blossoms.

"Here, Florizella!" cried her brother, "here is Mrs. Lamplough talking of selling my furniture already!"

"Selling the furniture!" repeated Miss Florizella in dismay, in the cracked wheezy voice which extreme obesity and constant attacks of asthma had made habitual to her. "Selling *my mother's* furniture! gracious heavens!" and from the sour expression in Miss Lamplough's face it did not appear that she was likely to be over-affectionate to her new sister-in-law.

But Mrs. Lamplough did not intend to let herself be snubbed by her new relative. She laid down her pencil and advanced to meet her. "I suppose this is your sister, Daniel," she said, "although you have not introduced her to me. You find me all in confusion, my dear Florizella; it would

have been better to have deferred your visit a little; still, I am very pleased to see you."

Miss Lamplough submitted to be kissed with a sulky grunt, and offensively repeated some remark concerning her mother's furniture, and what was wrong with it.

"O, as to the furniture," said Mrs. Lamplough, with a very sweet smile, "of course, if dear Daniel values it for his mother's sake, I should not dream of selling any of it; but you must confess that it is very ugly, and in the worst possible taste. But perhaps we could not expect any great refinement from her, poor woman, could we?"

Now, the late Mrs. Lamplough had, at an early period of her career, been engaged in the useful but homely occupation of dispensing butter and eggs behind the counter in her husband's shop in Southampton Row, and Miss Lamplough, who was always painfully alive to the humiliating fact, felt the sting of the allusion and was silenced.

Mr. Lamplough, who had been listening to the little passage of arms between the ladies of his family with an amused smile, not altogether displeased to find that his elegant wife had the best of it, here called out to Dorcas, who happened to be passing up stairs, to send the housemaid into the drawing-room to move the furniture back into its place again, and to replace the yellow muslin bag on the chandelier.

And thus ended Mrs. Lamplough's fruitless attempt at beautifying and reforming her new home.

It so happened that Juliet Travers did not go to the cricket-match at all. After Flora had gone off in high and somewhat artificial spirits in Captain Hartley's phaeton, Juliet had received a note from Lady Caroline Skinflint announcing her inability to go in consequence of a bad sick-headache, so she resigned herself not at all unwillingly to a quiet day alone.

Great was her astonishment when, early in the afternoon, a visitor was announced—none other than Mrs. Lamplough.

Mrs. Lamplough, arrayed in lace, and satin, and gorgeous apparel, and a wonderful Parisian bonnet, came towards her with outstretched lavender-kid hands, and with the most delighted and *empresse* manner, as if nothing unpleasant had ever passed between them.

"My dearest Juliet! how fortunate I am to find you alone, and how nice to think of having a chat with you, my dear girl! I

knew you would not wish me to stand upon ceremony with you; of course, being a bride," with a little affected giggle, "I ought, I suppose, to have waited for you to have called upon me first, but between you and me, dearest, I felt that there could be no such formalities, and I was so very anxious to see you;" and she took hold of Juliet's hands and made as if she would have kissed her.

Juliet had half risen from her chair, and looked and listened to her stepmother in positive amazement.

It passed through her mind to wonder at the various phases of human nature which were constantly presenting themselves to her. What could this woman be made of, to be smiling and fawning upon her, and calling her by loving names, as if the memory of their last interview were wholly wiped out of her mind?

Could she be neither a sincere friend nor even an honest enemy? The straightforwardness of her own nature revolted against the duplicity of the other.

She drew back a little coldly from the proffered embrace.

"I am surprised, I confess," she said, with hesitation; "I did not think—I did not imagine that after our last interview—"

"Ah, my dear, but I am not one that can bear malice," exclaimed her visitor with easy self-possession, sinking down into the cushiony depths of an easy-chair. "You know I was always warm-hearted; my feelings always carry me away; my sensibility, as I often say, is a snare to me, a positive snare; often, where prudence would keep me back, my heart, Juliet, carries me forward with a glow of enthusiasm. I positively cannot keep up a little quarrel with any one I love—to forgive and forget is ever my motto."

"There are some offences so deep, Mrs. Lamplough," answered Juliet, sternly, "that it must be a matter of years to forgive them, and to forget them is perhaps impossible."

And then Mrs. Lamplough was silent for a minute, looking keenly at her. Juliet was standing with her face turned slightly away from her, and her eyes bent down upon the pages of a book upon the table with which her slender fingers were trifling.

Through Mrs. Lamplough's mind there passed a rapid deliberation as to what was the best course for her to pursue. Here

was a woman with whom it behoved her at all risks to keep on good terms; her own position in London society depended in a great measure upon her stepdaughter. She was bent upon entering into fashionable society, and Juliet's house was the threshold and stepping-stone by which alone she knew how to attain the coveted paradise. Time enough to cast her off and to quarrel with her by-and-by when she had made good her own footing within the charmed circle; but for the present, for the next year probably, Juliet's goodwill and Juliet's invitations and introductions were an absolute necessity to her existence.

She had hoped to have established herself upon her old footing with her stepdaughter by a few affectionate words and caresses; it would have been much pleasanter and much easier to have ignored the stormy words that had passed between them, and to have avoided all reference to disagreeable subjects. But as Juliet did not seem disposed to let things slide into such easy grooves, there were other means at her disposal which she must perforce employ.

"Why are you so vindictive to me, Juliet?" she said, looking fixedly at her stepdaughter. "I really cannot see what you are to gain by making an enemy of me."

"An enemy!" repeated Juliet, turning round upon her with a heightened color, "I would far rather have an open enemy than a false friend."

"Fie, fie, Juliet!" putting up both her hands in front of her face; "what ugly words to apply to me! My dear, how can you think I should wish to be anything but most fond of you? It is true that circumstances have perhaps given me more knowledge of the details of your life—"

"Use your knowledge," broke in Juliet, passionately, "do your worst; I defy you to harm me."

"Well, I *might* do you a great deal of harm, Juliet," answered Mrs. Lamplough, with a glitter in her blue eyes that was almost a threat. "I might, of course, take away your character—it does not take much to do that for a fellow-woman now-a-days, if one has the inclination; but, my dear, why should you imagine that I wish to do so? Depend upon it, Juliet, your happiest and best plan is to give me a kiss and let bygones be bygones, and we will say no more about it. Of course, you believe that I did you a very unkind turn in stopping

that letter—well, I am sorry for it; but there is no real harm done; you are married, and rich, and sought after, and your husband does not bother you. Why should he or any one else ever know that the Colonel Fleming who comes to your house now is an old lover for whom you are hankering? Will such knowledge improve your position or your happiness?"

Juliet did not answer, bitterly feeling the truth of her words, and forced to acknowledge that it would be indeed best for her to be friends with this woman, who held her secret so cruelly in her power; and yet an outraged turmoil of pride and anger kept her silent.

Mrs. Lamplough looked at her for a few minutes, watching the effect of her words, and then she said, with a little laugh:

"If you are so obstinately silent, I shall begin to think that I am indeed in the way this afternoon; possibly, as you are alone to-day, you are expecting a favored visitor, or perhaps, like the lovers in the French plays, he fled at my inopportune entrance, and hid behind the window-curtains."

The gnat-bite answered where the open stab had failed. Juliet turned round her like a wounded creature.

"For heaven's sake," she cried, "spare me such cruel pleasantries. My life is as innocent as yours, and you know it; and if my heart is guilty, you know better than any one how far more sinned against than sinning I am. Say nothing more about this subject to me, I entreat you; it is an insult to me to allude to it, and—perhaps you are right—let us be friends; it will be better, possibly, for us all."

"Ah, there is my own dear girl!" cried Mrs. Lamplough, with an easy return to her usual gushing manner. "I knew you would be sensible and let this little cloud blow over, and leave us nothing but fair blue skies. Come, sit down beside me, and give me a kiss, dearest."

She drew her stepdaughter down into a seat close to her, and kissed her impassive cheek with a sort of clinging rapture that almost made Juliet shudder. "As if I ever could believe any naughty bad things of you, my dear girl! Pray don't imagine me to be such an unkind creature, I who am so fond of you. And now we will say no more about it ever again; let us talk of something else."

With an effort Juliet roused herself to

talk of ordinary topics—to ask her when she had come to town, how she liked her new home and her new life—and by degrees, as the bride's new hopes, and aims, and ambitions became revealed to her, Juliet began to understand what was to be her part of the contract of peace between them, and what was the price she was expected to pay in order to ensure her silence upon the one subject on which alone she was vulnerable—numberless invitations to her own

house, and introductions to the houses of her friends. It would be a bore, of course, but Juliet was cheerfully prepared to do her best; and she could not help admiring the skillful cunning which had enabled her stepmother to turn everything so satisfactorily to her own ends, and to make use of her so cleverly as a stepping-stone to attain her own objects and desires.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

THE HEIRESS AND HER GUARDIAN.

A TALE OF ENGLISH COUNTRY LIFE.

BY MRS. H. LOVETT CAMERON.

[*This Story was commenced in the November Number of the Magazine.*]

[CONCLUDED.]

CHAPTER XXXI.

WATTIE ELLISON DECLINES AN INVITATION.

FLORA TRAVERS sat on the box seat of the 99th drag at the Eton and Harrow match. The sun beat down fiercely upon the bright scene—upon the crowds of carriages, the sea of faces, the dazzling masses of pale and dark blue, which encircled the smooth open green sward in the middle, where every eye was fixed eagerly upon a handful of slender boys in white flannel.

I know not a more characteristically English scene than this same great annual cricket-match. In no other nation of Europe could such an intense excitement be created by so small a cause. Merely a game between a few schoolboys! Yet it is a thing of national interest. There is not a heart in all that vast assembly that does not beat with intense apprehension as to the final result of that two days' game, from the gray-haired statesman who remembers his own Eton days, and proudly watches his slight grandson fielding among the light blue Eleven, down to the fat-cheeked ten-year-old Harrow boy in the lowest form in the school, whos its among his school-fellows, hallooing and shouting he hardly knows at what.

And the ladies, bless them, are as eager as the men! Have they not all of them brothers, cousins, sons or grandsons, in one or other of the two great schools? And, if these are wanting, the lover possibly was a "Harrow man," or at all events they have a pair or so of gloves on the result, enough to give to one and all a feeling of enthusiastic partisanship.

No game is to the uninitiated so uninteresting to watch as cricket; yet all this great mixed multitude, three-fourths of whom hardly know swift from slow bowling, and have not the remotest idea what is meant by longstop or short slip, sit out here for hours and hours in the shadeless sunshine,

watching every ball in breathless and almost silent suspense, as if their very lives depended on it.

Flora Travers sits on the box seat of the 99th drag in her dark-blue bounet and white muslin dress, with a plate of cold salmon on her lap, and a glass of champagne in her hand. Captain Hartley is on one side of her, and another gallant Lancer, clinging on between earth and heaven, one foot on the wheel and one on some step midway, stands on the other side of her helping her to salad. Flora looks and laughs from one to the other, utters her little sallies, dimples over with pretty little smiles, registers her little bets, and looks and is supremely happy.

Every thought of Wattie and his displeasure has gone out of her head. It is very delightful to be where she is; Captain Hartley is devoted to her; she is conscious of being well dressed in spite of the dark-blue bonnet; the sunshine is bright, the scene is all new to her, and she is seventeen! What more can she want? The young are very philosophical; the passing hour is of more value to them than the lookout of their whole lives.

And then in the very middle of it all, just as the day was nearly over—when in half an hour six o'clock would be struck on the big clock across the ground, and the wickets would be drawn—just as she was laughing her gayest and looking her brightest and happiest, down in the moving crowd below she catches sight of Wattie's face looking up at her, stern and displeased.

She half rose from her seat and made a little gesture to beckon him to her; but he only lifted his hat distantly and coldly, and passed on and was lost among the sea of black coats. And all at once the sunshine, and the brightness, and all the freshness seemed to have gone out of everything, and nothing seemed pleasant or happy to her any longer. When she reached home an hour later, Juliet met her at the door.

"Well, dear, have you had a pleasant

day? have you enjoyed it?" she asked of her young sister-in-law. But Flora answered her dejectedly and wearily:

"O yes, I suppose so; it was very hot, and I am dreadfully tired." And she passed languidly up stairs.

"It was a delightful day, Juliet!" cried Mrs. Dalmaine, who had come home with her. "You poor dear, not to have gone at all! There was Lord George wandering about in misery, looking for you. He had to come and console himself with me. Such lots of people! and such a splendid lunch we had! And there is no doubt about it that Jack Hartley is quite struck by your Flora; you may take my word for it, that will be a match!"

With all Mrs. Dalmaine's flirting propensities, she always took a true woman's interest in the making up of a match. A marriage, she was in the habit of saying, often spoilt a man, but generally made a woman; and any addition to the sacred sisterhood of "frisky matrons" was hailed by her as a benefit to the community at large. She looked upon Flora as a very hopeful sort of young woman—"really, you know, not bad for a girl," she would say—and she would have been genuinely pleased to see her married to some one in her own set.

With all her faults, Rosa Dalmaine never grudged a younger and prettier woman her triumphs. She had suffered too much herself from the spiteful and envious tongues of other women to be anything but generous to a possible rival.

Mrs. Dalmaine had long ago forgiven Juliet for disappointing her about the water party to Maidenhead, but she had not forgotten her friend's promise of a dinner at Hurlingham to make up for it. The day was now fixed for this dinner, and the invitations were sent out. Cis promised Juliet that he would go, and Captain Hartley was of course among those invited.

"Would you mind very much asking one more, Juliet?" Flora said to her sister-in-law, with a trembling voice, coming up and standing nervously behind her chair.

"And whom do you want me to ask, Flora?"

"Wattie," answered the girl, with a deep blush. Juliet turned round and looked up at her for a moment.

"If you think you can manage to keep all your lovers in order, my dear," she said,

laughing, "I will ask him, by all means."

"O, thank you, Juliet dear!" cried Flora, with alacrity; and in her own mind she determined to show Wattie once for all how mistaken he was in being so jealous, by snubbing Captain Hartley and being everything that was gracious to himself. It should go hard with her, she thought, if she did not manage somehow to reinstate herself in his good graces during that evening.

The following morning the answer to Juliet's invitation lay on the breakfast-table. Flora, who was down first, recognized the handwriting of the note, but would not seem to notice it; she busied herself with teasing the kitten and putting lumps of sugar into the canary's cage, and would not even look round when Juliet came in and began opening her letters.

"Pretty dickey—pretty dick!" said Flora, standing in front of the cage stuffing her fingers through the bars, to the no small alarm of its fluttering and tweaking occupant. "Pretty little dickey!" And all the time her heart was beating and thumping so that she could hardly breathe.

"I am so sorry Wattie can't come on Saturday, Flora!" broke in Juliet's voice from the breakfast-table.

"Pretty dickey!" said Flora again, but this time in a fainter voice, and her heart seemed to stop altogether for an instant, and then she stood quite still, staring into the cage for a minute or two before she spoke.

"O, can't he? Well, I dare say we shall be very happy without him." And then she sat down to the table and helped herself rather largely to curried eggs.

Juliet had thrown the note carelessly across the table to her, and presently she took it up and read it—merely a formal answer—he was very sorry to be unable to accept Mrs. Travers's kind invitation—that was all; he did not even plead another engagement!

"I suppose you don't want to keep it," she said, and then solaced her angry feelings by tearing it up viciously into very small pieces.

When the morning of the dinner arrived, Cis said to his wife after breakfast:

"I am afraid I shan't be able to go with you to Hurlingham, Juliet."

"Not go, Cis? Why, you promised me that you would, and I think it will be

hardly civil to our guests if you do not," said Juliet, in some dismay.

"I am very sorry," he answered, looking down and shuffling his feet nervously up and down the hearthrug. "Of course I meant to go—but the fact is, I have had a letter from home—my father is not very well—nothing to speak of, of course, but I think he wants to see me, and in short I think I had better run down to-day, and I know you can do very well without me."

Juliet looked into her husband's face, and something in its weak irresolute lines told her that he was not speaking the truth to her.

"O, very well," she answered, coldly and contemptuously; "you can please yourself, of course."

Cis kissed her with some effusion, feeling rather thankful to be let off so easily, but Juliet shrank involuntarily from the conjugal salute.

"There, that will do; there is nothing to kiss me about; I suppose there is no occasion to say anything to Flora about your father's indisposition!" with a ring of scorn in the last words.

"O dear, no, certainly not!" said Cis, airily, and went his way into his study; and, having carefully shut the door, he drew out of his pocket and proceeded to read over a small note written in cramped foreign-looking characters.

"Will you come and see me to-morrow as early as you can?" ran this note. "I have an idle morning and a great deal to talk to you about—in fact, I want your advice and counsel upon a most important matter—you never have anything to do, so I know you will come if you can; and perhaps you will take me out to Hampstead, where I am due at three o'clock to play at a charity concert. I will make you benefit the charitable purposes of it by taking a ticket and listening to my performances."

"Yours sincerely, GRETCHEN."

Half an hour later Cis Travers had put himself into a hansom and was bowling along swiftly westwards towards Gretchen Rudenbach's little suburban villa.

"So Mr. Travers has thrown your dinner over!" said Mrs. Dalmaine, as the two friends were driving down together that afternoon to Hurlingham in the victoria, Flora having gone on with some other members of their party.

"Yes, he has gone down to Broadley," answered Juliet, putting a good face upon her husband's defection; "his father was not very well, and he thought he ought to go. It is tiresome of course, but—"

"But, neither you nor I ever thought he meant to come!" interrupted her friend, with a laugh.

"I don't know why you should say so," said Juliet, a little nettled. "Cis had every intention of going last night; I assure you it was only this morning, when the letter came from his father, that he thought it right to go down."

Mrs. Dalmaine threw back her pretty little blonde head, and burst out laughing.

"My poor Juliet! and you don't mean to say you believe that story? How wonderfully easily some wives are duped!"

"What do you mean, Rosa? You do not surely think—"

"I do most surely think that, having been up to lunch to-day with my old aunt, who lives at the back of the Zoological Gardens, as I came southwards in a hansom, I encountered your husband coming up northwards, also in a hansom, with—"

"Ah, for heaven's sake don't say it!" cried poor Juliet, clutching hold of her arm; but Rosa Dalmaine was relentless.

"Why do you get so upset about things, my dear? You had much better know who it was—it was that little German pianiste with the big innocent eyes, who played at your musical party."

And then Juliet leaned back in the carriage with a very white face, and did not speak another word during the rest of the drive.

It was not jealousy—she did not love her husband well enough to be jealous—it was the shame of it that she felt so acutely.

That he should stoop to deceive her, to invent paltry lies to mislead her, that he should put it into the power of others to twit her with his desertion and his double-dealing, made him appear so utterly contemptible in her eyes, that every shadow of affection and respect that lingered in her heart towards him died away out of it from that very minute. What duty, she asked herself bitterly, does a wife owe to a husband who has thus lost all claim to her respect? what meaning, what binding power is there in those old vows to "love and to honor," where it has become impossible to do either? Poor storm-tossed, well-nigh de-

spairing woman! Only the temptation seemed now wanting to complete her most utter loss. And even that was not far off.

About an hour later on that same afternoon it so happened that Colonel Fleming was standing idly lighting his cigar on the steps outside his club, listening with half-attention to some old Indian reminiscences which Major General Chutney was volubly pouring into his ear, when a phaeton and showy pair of high-stepping cobs pulled up at the door, and Hugh recognized with a nod his cousin, that lord of whom mention has before been made in these pages.

"My dear Hugh!" cried this august personage, "delighted to see you! I came after another fellow, but you'll do much better—come, jump up here; I've got a few men to dinner at Hurlingham this evening—will you join us? Jump up, and I'll drive you down. The man who was going with me has lost his grandmother, or his uncle, or somebody, and just sent to say he can't go—and it is so dull, driving alone; and, by Jove, I'd rather have your company than any one else's; so jump up."

"Thanks," answered Hugh, with no great earnestness; "you are very kind, but I don't think Hurlingham dinners are much in my line. I have been so long away, you know. It's very kind, all the same, of you—"

"Kind, be —!" exclaimed his lordship, with good-tempered heartiness. "Don't stand making speeches to me. What's the good of a cousin if he can't take a short notice and come and dine with one in a friendly way! I really want your company, man; so make no more fuss about it, but jump up, and don't keep these fidgeting brutes waiting any longer."

"O, if you put it in that way, of course I shall be delighted," said Hugh; and straightway mounted into the phaeton, and nodding farewell to the little general, was driven off.

Major General Chutney, who knew the great man well by sight, gazed after them with admiring awe.

"How pleased Mrs. Chutney will be to hear about it!" he reflected, rubbing his hands together; "called him 'Hugh,' too, as chummy as possible, and off they drove like a couple of brothers! Mrs. Chutney will like to hear about it; she was so angry with her sister the other day for saying she didn't believe his cousin the lord ever no-

ticed him. It will be quite a little triumph for Mrs. Chutney—quite—she'll want to ask him to dinner at once, I believe."

So it was that fate brought these two, Juliet Travers and Hugh Fleming, together once more that day.

There is no pleasanter, sweeter spot in and about all our dusty toiling capital than that cool green riverside Club, that has of late years taken so important a place in London's yearly gayeties. The afternoon sunshine comes slantingly down upon the somewhat weather-beaten facade of the old-fashioned house, that has no pretensions to architectural beauty, yet has a certain old-world dignity which gives it a quiet charm of its own. On the smooth green lawn before it are spread out numberless little tables with snowy cloths, where tea and strawberries are being rapidly consumed by the gay chattering crowd, in many-colored butterfly garments. Further on is a background of green—the shaded meadow, with glimpses of the white shining river beyond it through the gaps in the chestnut trees; whilst the faint popping of the guns beyond the garden hardly detracts from the rurality of the scene.

English people have few outdoor recreations; yet there is hardly a nation in Europe that values and appreciates so well the few it has.

By-and-by the crowd disperses, carriages drive off, and the gardens are deserted. Two parties remaining to dine are alone left in the big empty house and its grounds.

"There is another dinner-party in the next room," whispered Flora to her sister-in-law, as they went into the house; "I wonder who they are."

"Only some men, I think; I hope they won't be very noisy," answered Juliet, carelessly.

The dinner was long and hot, and, as far as Juliet was concerned, interminably wearisome.

It struck her for the first time, too, that Flora was talking to Captain Hartley with an eagerness and an excitement that were hardly natural to her, and that Captain Hartley was drinking a good deal of champagne, and seemed to be drawing her on into a more marked and noticeable flirtation than she quite approved of. She began to feel sorry that he had been invited, and to hope that no harm would come of it.

Rosa Dalmaine, too, was full of life and

vivacity, and kept the talk going with untiring energy; the other two ladies of the party also seemed full of enjoyment, and to be equally delighted with themselves and the men who sat on either side of them.

Only Juliet herself felt dull, and spiritless, and weary—her head ached, and talking was an effort to her. She longed to be alone, to think out the miserable story of her husband's duplicity, which saddened and revolted her even more than his supposed infidelity could do.

She was very thankful when some one proposed leaving the hot dinner-room and adjourning to the gardens. The long windows were thrown open, and in a few minutes the whole party had gladly dispersed itself out of doors.

Wrapping her shawl hastily round her, Juliet fled alone into the darkened summer night. The perfect silence and solitude, succeeding to the noisy clatter of the dinner-table, were a relief to her; the cool night breezes fanned her heated brow; heavily-scented lime trees, and rich clusters of cream and crimson roses, filled the air with a thousand subtle perfumes, and seemed to calm and soothe the turmoil in her heart.

Presently she came to the river—it sped along swiftly, but silently—a wide white flood in the silver moonlight.

She walked slowly, her arms folded upon her bosom, her head bent downwards, her long silk draperies trailing heavily upon the gravel walk behind her.

And, all at once, just where a bright gleam of summer moonshine broke through an opening in the dark trees, some one stood in front of her, and called her by her name:

"Juliet, is that you?"

She stood still and looked up. Hugh Fleming stood before her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BY THE RIVER.

"Yes, it is I," she answered. "How did you come here? I did not know you were here. Were you dining in the next room to us?"

He drew her into the deep shade of the trees before he answered her.

"Yes, I was dining with my cousin; he asked me this afternoon. I did not want to

come, but he made such a point of it that I could not well refuse. Believe me, had I known that you were to be here, I would not have come."

"How many apologies, Hugh, for the misfortune of meeting me!" she said, not reproachfully nor bitterly, but very, very sadly.

He did not answer.

They stood together, those two, in the utter silence of the night, alone, and yet apart; they were side by side, yet she did not even look at him; the dark trees threw their sheltering shadows about them, the wide river flowed on at their feet. Against its white hazy flood, Juliet's tall dark figure stood out clear and distinct; he could see every line of the delicate profile turned away from him, every fluttering lock of her soft hair, that the light breeze had ruffled upon her brow, and the slender white fingers, clasped listlessly together, that shone out like ivory against her dark dress.

"Shall I go? would you like me to go?" she asked, very gently, turning to him and holding out her hand.

He took the hand, but held it fast.

"No, as we have met, let me say good-by to you here. I must have seen you once again."

"Good-by?" she asked, falteringly.

"Yes, good-by. I have made up my mind to go back to India as soon as I possibly can. Until then, I shall leave town and go into the country, to Paris, perhaps; anywhere away from London and from you. It is better so, believe me."

Back upon her memory there came that scene at Sotherne, long years ago, when once before he had told her he was going to leave her: the darkened room, the flickering firelight—his words so nearly the same as those he was speaking now—the faint sickness at her heart, and then her own mad words of despair.

Are things perpetually thus repeated and reproduced in this world in an ever revolving circle? she wondered vaguely, with a dull aching wonder that was hardly pain.

"I am much stronger than I was," he continued, in an unmoved calm voice. "My doctor tells me there is no reason why I should stay in England longer than I like. I cannot well sail before the end of October or the beginning of November; but, meanwhile, I have one or two invitations to Scotland, and an uncle in the south who would

like to see me before I go back, and I can always spend a week or two in Paris with an old friend. I mean to leave town next week, and should have called to wish you good-by in a day or two; but, as we have met, let us say our good-by here; it will be better, don't you think so?"

But Juliet stood still, with head low bowed upon her bosom, and did not answer.

"You know very well how bitter it is to me to leave you," he went on, after a few moments in a lower voice, and clasping the hand that he held tighter within his own. "But you know also that there is no other course left for me, after—after what has happened. As long as I am here, you can have no rest, no peace, my poor child—but when I am gone, and you are no longer in daily dread of coming across me, you will be able to take an interest once more in your ordinary duties and occupations—the memory of much that is now painful to you will become softened and dimmed by time and absence, and you will grow reconciled to that life which my unfortunate presence has for a while troubled."

Then all at once the floodgates of her heart were opened, and she burst into a wild and passionate cry:

"My life! what is my life? What have I to live for? What one single thing have I in this world to make me love it? Hugh, my love, my darling—do not leave me, for pity's sake, do not leave me again—I cannot live without you—take me with you—take me with you!"

Her arms were round his neck, her warm breath, her passionate words in his ear, her heaving bosom upon his heart. With a smothered cry, he clasped her there, tightly, despairingly, and showered down mad hot kisses upon her sweet quivering lips.

And then upon his heart she poured forth all the story of her wasted life, all the love she had given to him long ago, all the miserable despair that had driven her to marry Cis, all the honest struggles, the hard warfare that she had waged ever since with her own heart. All the story of her husband's falseness and duplicity, his coldness to her, his contemptible weakness, his powerlessness to ensure even her regard and esteem—she told it all, the long pent-up misery of a lifetime, in broken sobbing words, clasped upon his heart; and then came again the wail:

"What have I left—what have I to live

for, if you leave me? O Hugh! take me with you, take me with you!"

In the moments of silence that succeeded her passionate words—words in which all pride, all shame, all self-consciousness, every lesser feeling was merged in the one great love that, through all its sinfulness, had yet something almost divine in its utter self-devotion, like the impress of a master's chisel on the ruined temples of antiquity—in those few moments, when the beating of their own hearts seemed to sound in the ears of those two louder than the soft sighing of the wind in the branches above them, than the subdued slush of the river against its banks at their feet—in those moments God knows what reckless agony of despair was not in the heart of the woman, what fierce heat of soul-consuming temptation in that of the man.

And then he spoke, brokenly, tremblingly at first, but more steadily, more clearly, as he went on.

"Dearest," and his hand tenderly strayed over the soft dark head that lay on his bosom, "I do not think I ever loved you so well as at this moment. Do you remember in the old days how once before you offered your sweet self to me, love? and how I left you then because honor bade me?—fatal error, that I have ever since regretted, and never more bitterly than at this moment! Then it was myself that I considered; I was afraid of being thought to have taken an unfair advantage over you, to have sought your money, to have wooed you as the heiress, and not as the woman. If such scruples were strong enough to make me leave you then—leave you as, before God, I believed, to forget me shortly in a more suitable marriage with another—do you not think I have ten thousand times stronger reasons for leaving you now—now that it is not my honor, but yours, that is at stake? Can your dishonor, your disgrace, bring happiness to either of us? Darling, I love you too well to take you at your word!"

"You despise me!" she sobbed, moving uneasily in his arms.

"Not so, love. Can a man, worthy of the name of man, ever do otherwise than honor the woman whose only sin is that of loving him too well? To me you must ever be the same—it is of the world's slanders that I was speaking—you do not know how cruel and how blighting they can be, my child. You think you would not feel them;

but, believe me, I should feel them for you. My Juliet, my darling! second, but dearest and strongest love of my life, that no other woman can ever displace from my heart whilst I live—by your own dear words you have placed yourself and your life in my hands. Well, then, I will dispose of it. I give it you back, as the most precious gift I can offer you! I tell you that, lonely and miserable as it is, it is still better and holier than the life you would spend with me—that there are duties still left for you, in the patient fulfilment of which you may still find—if not happiness, at least peace.”

He ceased speaking. Juliet's cheek, wet with tears, was pressed against his arm in silence.

Across the river, the lights on the opposite bank gleamed out in the darkness, and flung long streaks of broken red flame across the water. A bird, awakened, perhaps, by the sound of their voices, twittered for a moment in the branches above them. A gust of distant laughter came up from the great white clubhouse behind them, so faint, so distant, that its merriment scarcely jarred upon them. All his life long, Hugh could see that scene before his eyes, and hear those sounds in his ears.

“Hugh, I cannot—I cannot leave off loving you,” she said, raising her heavy eyes, glistening with tears, to his.

“God forbid that you should,” he answered. “I do not think the impossible is ever expected of us in this world—to tell you to do that would be to tell you to work miracles. Why should you not love me, my poor child? You have nothing else to love! Away with those who would see a sin in love! Love is divine—intense honest love, however mistaken, however unfortunate the circumstances of it may be, must forever be ennobling to him who loves and to him who is loved. Love me, my child, as I shall love you; but, darling, we may not meet—not again in this world, if we can help it. I will keep out of your way even if I ever come back from India again; and for the present, for many years probably, there will be half the earth between us; and I will write to you often. We may at least be friends, dear friends, since we must be nothing more.”

“You will write!” she said, in a brighter voice—“that will comfort me; and I may write to you?”

“Yes, indeed, I shall look for your letters

—letters that, I trust, will not tell me of a thoroughly empty and wasted existence—that will not be filled from January to December with nothing but the doings of fashionable life; of the sayings of such women as Mrs. Dalmaine; of such men as Lord George Mannersley. Your heart is too noble, your mind is too refined, my Juliet, to waste on such companions as these. Go down to Sotherne again, whether your husband go with you or not; live on your own land and among your own people; and then see whether life has not left you much to occupy and to interest you. It grieves me to think that Sotherne has been so long neglected by your father's daughter—dear Sotherne! Will it make you like to be there oftener, Juliet, if I tell you that I love the place, that when I am far away it will make me a little happier to think of you there than here? For my sake, if for nothing else, will you make it your home again?”

“I will do everything you tell me,” she answered, humbly, looking up at him.

He was not looking at her; his eyes were turned away across the shadowy river, and a gleam of moonlight lit up his strong brave face, that was neither beautiful nor young; yet out of his deep-set thoughtful eyes there shone the steadfast light of the great true heart within him, giving it a beauty of the soul which is lacking in many a more regularly chiselled countenance.

At that moment Juliet felt she could hardly pity herself and her lot. It was so good, she felt, to be so loved and so cared for by such a man. It was something to have lived for, to have won such a heart as his! And if, indeed, as he told her, they must never meet again in this world, surely the memory of this night alone must console her forever for the blank years that were to succeed it.

“You are so good to me!” she whispered.

He looked down at her with one of those quick tender smiles which seemed to come into his face like a flash of sunlight for Juliet alone.

But the sight of her white face of misery, of her dark upturned eyes, wet with unshed tears, and solemn in their unspeakable woe, seemed almost too much for him. The smile faded from his face, and his lip trembled.

“Say good-by to me, my darling,” he whispered hurriedly. Once more their lips

met in a kiss wherein there was no longer any joy nor any passion, but only the blank despair of an eternal farewell. "God help you, my child!" he said; and turned from her suddenly, and left her standing there, a dark, silent, motionless figure, alone by the white swift river.

Not looking after him, she stood there listening—listening with every faculty within her—to the sound of his footsteps as they gradually died away upon the gravel path. Fainter and fainter they came to her ears, till at last a total silence succeeded to their irregular sound. It was the last of Hugh Fleming! So had he passed away from her forever. Thus was the tragedy of her life played out!

With a long shivering sigh, Juliet turned and walked a few steps in the opposite direction; then stopped again, feeling strangely weak and feeble, and, leaning against the trunk of a tree, looked out again across the river.

As she stood there, a boat dropped noiselessly down the stream, close in to the shore. A man was rowing, a boy stood up in the front of the boat, and in the stern was a woman muffled up in a shawl, crouched down with her head bent forward upon her knees, her face buried in her hands.

Afterwards Juliet recollected noticing this silent boat load, and speculating with something like a keen interest upon what was the history of this little family, whose faces she could not see, and whose forms alone stood out in *chiara oscura* against the white background of the water. Whence did they come? Whither were they bound? What sorrow had bowed down that poor woman into that attitude of dejected grief?

"God help her, whatever her trouble may be, poor soul!" murmured Juliet, half aloud, as the boat passed out of sight round a bend of the river. And who knows whether that short prayer from the woman who knew her not, yet felt for her with that keen sense of human fellowship with suffering which sometimes, with a flash of godlike pity, seems to sweep away all distinction of class and caste, and to make us one with the beggar in the street—who can say that that prayer was not indeed heard and answered to that other sorrow-laden woman, who did not even see the dark pitying figure of her who prayed for her upon the river bank as she passed by!

In those first moments, Juliet hardly realized her own trouble. She could not have shed a single tear. If you had asked her the most trivial question, she would have answered you in her usual voice, as if nothing had happened. A numb feelingless apathy was upon her; she could not even fix her thoughts upon what had passed. She wondered vaguely if she was heartless, if she had turned into stone, if she had lost all power of sorrowing!

"He is gone!" she kept on repeating to herself. "I shall never see him in this world again; never hear his voice; never see him smile; never, never, as long as I live!" And yet the words seemed like so many meaningless empty sounds to her as she uttered them.

All at once the voices of her everyday life broke in upon her. Some of the gay party amongst whom she had sat at dinner-time—ah, how long ago it seemed now! and what a lifetime she had lived through since she had last seen their faces!—came laughing and chatting along the river-walk, talking about some of the hundred little topics of daily life, about the bets upon the last week's cricket-match, the plans for next week's gayeties, the prospects and arrangements for Goodwood. Juliet shrank closer under the shadow of the tree against which she leant, until the talkers had gone by. Everything was going on just as usual, the world was hurrying on gay and careless from one bright scene of enjoyment to another; and she herself—ah God! how utterly alone in it she was!

With a sudden pang of suffering she roused herself, and walked hastily back to the house. She found Flora and Captain Hartley lingering together among the rose-beds.

"It is getting late, Flora; we had better go home. Do you think my carriage is here? Captain Hartley, will you kindly go and inquire for it?"

"Are you tired, Juliet?" asked Flora, in a sort of dreamy voice, as Jack Hartley hurried off.

"Yes, dear, very tired; I have had a headache. Has any one of our party gone yet?"

"No, I think not; but all those other men have left who were dining in the next room."

"Ah!" and she drew a long breath. Then he was gone!

"You are not half clad, Flora, in that thin muslin dress. Come, child, fetch your cloak, and let us go."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CAPTAIN HARTLEY RETIRES GRACEFULLY.

SOMEBODY tapped at Mrs. Travers's bedroom door at about eleven o'clock the following morning.

"May I come in, Juliet?" said Flora, half opening it. "Is your headache better?"

Juliet lay on the sofa wrapped in a white dressing-gown; her dark hair fell in thick masses on the cushions behind her head, and her face was as white as marble. There were heavy circles round her lustreless eyes, which made them look as if they had been open all the night. Her appearance was sufficient to have attracted notice to her wan and miserable face, but Flora did not seem conscious of it. Something else was on the girl's mind.

"I have come to tell you something—a piece of news," she said, standing a little behind her sister-in-law, so that her face was hidden from her.

"Well, what is it?" said Juliet, listlessly.

"Juliet, Captain Hartley proposed to me last night, and I accepted him."

And then Juliet sat bolt upright on the sofa and looked at her.

Flora hung her head; there was none of the exultant joy, none of the shy gladness of a girl who has won a longed-for lover, in her face—only white cheeks, and heavy eyelids that were swollen with tears and sleeplessness.

"Accepted Jack Hartley, Flora!" cried Juliet. "Why, you don't care for him any more than I do. What can have possessed you?"

"I have accepted him," repeated Flora, with a certain doggedness, and looking away from her sister-in-law out of the window.

And then Juliet got up and stood in front of the girl, and, taking both her hands in hers, forced her to look into her face.

"Flora, my dear," she said, gently, "you have got yourself into a great scrape, for you know very well that you care for Wattie Ellison and for no one else."

"You have no right to say that, Juliet," she cried, impatiently, her eyes filling with sudden tears; "that is all at an end. I

have promised to marry Jack, and I must abide by my word."

"You shall do nothing of the sort," cried Juliet, passionately. All at once she seemed to see in herself almost a divine mission to save this young ignorant girl from the consequences of her own folly. In the old days no one had put out a hand to save her from a loveless marriage, but it should not be her fault if Flora fell into the same fatal error that had shadowed her own life. Here was a duty and an occupation even such as Hugh had told her she would find in her life; something to do at once for another that should leave her no time for vain and selfish repinings over her own fate.

"Listen to me, Flora," she said, in a voice that was solemn from the earnestness of her meaning; "never, if I can prevent it, shall you be guilty of the sin of marrying one man whilst your heart belongs to another."

"Sin, Juliet!" faltered Flora.

"Yes, for sin it is, and nothing less. Do you not know, child, that a wedding-gown and a gold ring and a few spoken words have no possible power to change the heart? Girls seem to think that with their wedding-day everything is altered and swept away—that their present life is ended, and a new self ushered in that will remember no more, nor feel nor think any longer the feelings or the thoughts of old. I tell you, Flora, it is not so. The man that you love to-day you will love after you are married to another, possibly all the more intensely because he is so hopelessly beyond your reach; the thoughts, the hopes, the longings that belong to Wattie Ellison to-day, will be his on the morrow of your wedding, though a triple wedding-ring and thrice-told vows were to bind you to Jack Hartley. If girls thought of this oftener, there would be fewer unhappy marriages in the world. Quarrel with your Wattie if you like, and die an old maid—you will be ten thousand times happier so than if you become that most wretched and miserable of God's creatures, a loveless wife."

The earnestness of her words impressed the girl with a sort of terror—Flora was trembling in every limb. "What shall I do?" she cried, clasping her hands together despairingly. "You see, I have promised—how can I possibly get out of it now?"

"Did Captain Hartley say anything about calling here to-day?"

"Yes, he was to come about half-past twelve this morning to see me. I do not know how to meet him, I am so miserable!"

Juliet glanced at the clock.

"Very well, Flora, if you will do exactly as I tell you, and leave everything to me, I will see if I can get you out of this trouble."

"How good you are!" cried Flora, and she flung her arms round Juliet's neck, and, amid a flood of tears, confessed many things to her about her foolish infatuation for Jack Hartley's handsome face, which had made her behave so badly to Wattie—and how she loved Wattie with her whole heart and soul, but was afraid he was too angry and disgusted with her heartless flirting ever to forgive her or to care for her again.

"You are a very naughty silly girl," said Juliet to her; "but I am determined that you shall not be a wicked one as well. Now you must do exactly as I tell you. Go and put on your bonnet, and tell William to call you a cab. You are to go straight to Mrs. Dalmaine, and tell her I have sent you to lunch with her, and you can take her those dress patterns, and talk about that new dress I promised you, and stay there till I call for you this afternoon in the carriage. If she is going out, you can still sit quietly there till I come for you, but you must promise me not to come away from her house till I fetch you."

"I will do anything you tell me, Juliet," answered the girl, meekly and gratefully.

So it came to pass that when Captain Hartley was ushered half an hour later into the cool flower-scented drawing-room in Grosvenor Street, he found sitting there, not his pretty gray-eyed, fair-headed *fiancee*, but her handsome sister-in-law, calm and self-possessed as usual outwardly, but inwardly awaiting the interview with no little trepidation.

Now, to say the truth, Jack Hartley had been all the morning in a very disturbed and uncomfortable frame of mind, and had been ever since a very early hour reflecting with some dismay and a very bad headache on his last night's after-dinner escapade.

To say that he had been drunk overnight would perhaps be rather overstating the fact—but he certainly had taken more champagne than was usual to him, and, as he grimly reflected, it had been beastly sweet stuff, and had flown to his head in an unaccountable manner.

He certainly admired and even liked Flora Travers very much indeed. He had sat next her at dinner, and had wandered about among the rosebeds in the darkened garden with her afterwards. The night air had been soft and balmy, the night odors had been sweet and soul-entrancing; there had been no listeners save the grasshoppers and the night moths with folded wings among the flower-beds, and no lookers-on save the silver stars and one jewel-eyed frog upon the gravel path, staring at them with all his might and main.

Given all these fortuitous circumstances, and a young man and a maiden wandering about alone together in a shadowy garden, and given that the young man is of a sentimental and impressionable turn of mind, and has taken rather more than is good for him, and that the maiden is fair to look upon; that her slight white-robed figure gleams out with graceful distinctness in the darkness, that her eyes shine upon him in the starlight with a softness which no gas-burners have ever imparted to them before; given all this, and you can have but one inevitable result—love-making. It may be only a little sham manufacture—a pretty make-believe on both sides; or it may be that, carried away by a temporary exaltation, the love assumes a more serious aspect, and is made in real sober earnest; but in some shape or other you may be very sure that love-making will go on.

Now, Jack Hartley had been so carried away into making much more serious love than he had any idea of.

When he drove down to that Hurlingham dinner he had no more intention of proposing to pretty Flora Travers than he had of eloping with his grandmother. So that when he awoke the following morning, and realized that he had not only proposed to her, but had also been accepted, he was, to say the least of it, very much disturbed.

Not that he in any way objected to the little spoilt beauty. She was charming, a dear little girl, a prize any man might be proud of; but our friend Jack was not exactly in a position for marrying anything short of an heiress with five thousand a year.

His own income was small, and his debts were alarmingly large, and had a way of increasing weekly and yearly with a fearful steadiness and regularity; and Jack knew very well that Flora was no heiress, and

that with no money of hers could that long list of debts be paid off.

Nevertheless, Jack Hartley was a gentleman, and no idea of not keeping to his bargain entered for one moment into his head.

As he pulled on his boots, and rang the bell for his shaving water, he cursed himself for a fool to have been carried away by a pair of gray eyes and a soft little white hand, and all the witchery of a midsummer night, into doing so very mad a deed as he had been guilty of the evening before; but all the same, he sent for a button-hole flower, and took very particular pains with his dress and general appearance, and started off with eager punctuality for his interview with the girl who had promised to become his wife.

"I called to see Miss Travers," he said, when he had shaken hands with Juliet.

"Yes, I know, Captain Hartley," she answered; "but Flora has gone out to lunch."

"Gone out!" he repeated, in astonishment.

"Yes, I have sent her out; and, if you will not mind, Captain Hartley, I want to have a little talk to you myself."

"O, certainly, Mrs. Travers;" but, man-like, as soon as he scented opposition, he began to make up his mind to stick to Flora with all his might.

"Do you know, Captain Hartley," began Juliet, rather nervously, fidgeting with the trimmings of her dress as she spoke, "I am afraid this is rather a foolish business altogether between you and Flora."

"How foolish?" he asked, a little stiffly.

"Well, I need not tell you that a marriage between you would be utterly out of the question. I do not think that, from all I have heard, you are in a position at all; and Flora would have nothing but what her father might allow her—which would not be much, were she to marry you—as I am sure he would most strongly object to it. And—forgive me if I appear impertinent—but it is said that you have extravagant habits, and are very much in debt—is it not so? Of course her father would expect you to relinquish the one and to clear yourself from the other—may I ask how you would propose doing so?"

Jack Hartley was silent. He sat forward on his chair, and twisted his hat about in his hands, and looked rather sulky.

"Flora has been entrusted to my care," continued Juliet, "and I consider myself answerable to her parents for any impru-

dence she may be led into whilst staying with me; so you must forgive my speaking to you so openly upon this subject. Captain Hartley, excuse me for telling you that I don't believe that you are prepared to alter your whole style of living for Flora's sake, neither do I think that she is the sort of girl who would be happy as a poor man's wife."

"How can I propose to a girl one evening and give her up the next morning?" said Jack, surlily; "how can you expect me to do such a blackguard thing? At all events, let me plead my cause, such as it is, to her parents."

"That is precisely what I want to avoid; at present, no one knows anything about it but you two and myself—let us all three settle that it is a foolish and impossible idea, and there need be nothing more said about it."

"But Flora herself will not consent to give me up, Mrs. Travers; and if the dear little girl is willing to stick to me, by George, I will stick to her!"

"Flora," answered Juliet, with a smile—for she had no intention of lowering her sister-in-law's dignity, nor of wounding Captain Hartley's feelings, by revealing to him that Flora was not in the least in love with him, and had only accepted him from pique with another man—"Flora is, I am happy to say, too sensible to wish to carry on an engagement which she knows can never result in marriage, and which can only bring trouble on you both. I have had a long talk with her this morning, and she has decided to be guided by me entirely; and if you will consent to look upon your last night's words to her as a piece of folly on both sides which had better be forgotten as soon as possible, she has commissioned me to tell you that she will do the same, as she is sure that it will be better for your happiness to forget her."

"You mean to say that she wants to break it off, then?"

"Yes, I think she does; and fortunately you have not known each other long enough for it to be more than a transient pang to either of you. I shall send Flora home in a few days; and if you do not meet her till next season, you will probably have quite got over any little awkwardness by that time, and be very thankful to me for having spared you the misery of a marriage on a very small and inadequate income."

Jack Hartley began pacing up and down the room. It was really a wonderful piece of luck to have things so comfortably taken out of his hands, and to have the way to an honorable retreat so comfortably opened to him. Of course the idea of marriage with a penniless girl was madness—it couldn't be thought of; he ought to be too thankful to any one who saved him from the misery of a comfortless lodging, a badly-dressed wife, possible babies, ill-cooked dinners, cheap cigars, and a maid-of-all-work. Even a passing thought of these things made him shudder with horror and disgust. Mrs. Travers was quite right; he was not sufficiently in love with Flora to be able even to contemplate with equanimity such an utter revolution in his life for her sake; he had better by all means resign her at once, and be satisfied that he had done all an honorable man could be expected to do to fulfil the rash engagement he had so foolishly entered into; he had been perfectly ready to fulfil his part of the contract, and if she and her relations had seen fit to draw back, why, he ought to thank his stars for getting off so easily, and be perfectly content.

Perfectly content, of course.

And yet there was a hankering at his heart for another sight of her gray eyes, and the small fair head, and the saucy red lips that somehow, now that they were to be taken away from him, seemed to become more precious in his sight than they had ever appeared before.

"I suppose I might not see her again—just to wish her good-by?" he said, rather piteously, stopping in his uneasy walk about the room in front of Juliet's chair, whilst a vision of one more kiss from those sweet lips floated temptingly before his imagination.

"Certainly not," answered Juliet; and she could not help laughing, for she pictured to herself at once how Flora would weep and deplore her wickedness, and probably confess the whole truth about Wattie in her self-reproaches, and so break down the whole course of her own strong line of argument. "Certainly not; no possible good could come of it, and it would be only a very painful ordeal for her."

"Well, I dare say you are right," said Captain Hartley, ruefully. "Will you tell her I am sorry—I spoke rashly to her; I ought, of course, to have considered everything—and I wouldn't drag her down to a

wretchedly poor marriage for the world. I shall always be fond of her, and grateful to her for being willing to have me—but it is better not; and now I think I will go, Mrs. Travers."

So, with a tremble of real emotion in his broken words, such as he had hardly believed himself capable of feeling for little Flora Travers, Captain Hartley took his leave, walked somewhat unsteadily down Grosvenor Street, owing to an unusual dimness before his eyes, then turned into Bond Street, where he encountered a friend, into whose arm he linked his own, and by the time he had reached his club in Pall Mall had, under the influence of congenial society and a good cigar, completely recovered his equanimity and his usual good spirits.

Wattie Ellison was hard at work at his chambers in the Temple. No painting litter, no easels with half-finished pictures upon them were to be seen about his rooms now, as in the old days when he had aspired to be a Royal Academician, and had copied Gretchen Rudenbach's gentle face as a study for his "Joan of Arc." Somewhere or other up in a lumber-room, behind several dusty portmanteaus, and a pile of very much dustier law papers, that same canvas was leaning with its face to the wall, just as it had been left on the morning of Georgie Travers's death—with the figure of Joan of Arc drawn in, and Gretchen Rudenbach's face, fairly finished, shining like the head of a saint out of the blank canvas, whilst a confused mass of black chalk scratches all round it served dimly to shadow forth the howling raving multitude that were to have been seen struggling and fighting below her scaffold.

Long ago had Wattie Ellison done with such idle fancies of a short cut to fame and fortune. His table now-a-days is covered with briefs, his clerk looks in every now and then to receive orders and directions, and his face looks very stern and aged since the days when he was poor Georgie's penniless lover who rode his uncle's horses, and had much ado to keep himself in boots and breeches through the hunting season.

Presently the clerk comes in with a cup of coffee and a piece of dry toast on a tray, announcing it somewhat pompously as "your lunch, sir." Mr. Ellison answers, "All right, put it down," and goes on with his reading and taking notes till the coffee gets stone-cold, when he drinks it all off at

a gulp, and munches the toast with his eyes still riveted upon the blue pages of the draft in his hand.

Little enough time has a rising young bar-rister, with a fast-spreading reputation for talent, for any such trivial occupation as luncheon!

Presently the clerk looks in again.

"If you please, sir," he says, with some hesitation, "there is a lady wishes to speak to you."

"Eh, what—a lady? Some begging gov-erness, I suppose. I can't possibly see her, Adams."

"So I told her, sir," said Adams, doubt-fully; "but she seemed to think you would be sure to speak to her—and she is a lady, sir, and none of your begging-women."

"Very well, go and ask her her name."

Presently Adams came back with Mrs. Travers's card between a very much ink-stained finger and thumb.

"Show her in at once."

And Juliet enters.

"I am very sorry to disturb you, Wattie," says Juliet, when she had shaken hands with him, and had taken the chair he has-tened to offer her. "I wont detain you one moment; I only want to ask you if you will go down to Broadley next Sunday."

"Why, is Mr. Travers ill?" he asked, quickly.

"Not at all, that I know of; but the old man is always, as you know, glad to see you; and, besides, Flora will be at home again," added Juliet, looking down demure-ly at the threadbare carpet below her feet.

"I don't see what that has to do with me," answered Wattie, with stern disappro- bation of Flora and her movements in his voice.

"Don't you?" cried Juliet, looking up at him suddenly in her impetuous way; "then I will tell you—I think it has everything to do with you. I am a very old friend of yours, Wattie, so I am going to take the liberty of telling you that you are just throw- ing your happiness away; and I can tell you that, if you wont take the trouble to put out your hand to take her, somebody else will save you the trouble."

"If Flora prefers somebody else—" be- gan Wattie, stiffly.

"She does nothing of the sort," broke in Juliet, angrily; "and the proof is that she is going back home to Broadley again as free as when she came to me; and I can tell

you," she added, with a free translation of the events that had happened which was thoroughly feminine, "that if she had chosen she might have gone home engaged to Captain Hartley, and that she is not ought to be a proof to you that, whatever little faults she may have, her heart, at all events, is in the right place."

"Do you mean to say that Hartley pro- posed to her?" asked Wattie, excitedly; for the idea of a rival is never pleasing to any man.

"Certainly I do; and somebody else will probably do the same unless you look after her yourself. I have no patience with you, Wattie—letting a nice affectionate girl like Flora slip through your fingers, just because you don't choose to take the trouble to speak to her."

"It is not that, I assure you, Mrs. Trav- ers," began Wattie, eagerly, and flushing a little as he spoke. "I never meant to force Flora's affections—and I have fancied late- ly that she did not care for me except as an old friend. She has been cold in her man- ner to me, and has done several things which she knew I did not wish her to do, For instance, there was the day at Lord's— could anything prove more plainly to a man that a girl did not care for him than that proves?"

"O, what fools you men are!" cried Juliet; "why, her coldness to you and dis- regard of your wishes was just what showed how much she was thinking of you; and as to the cricket-match, why, she went in a dark-blue bonnet which made her look al- most plain, just because you are a Harrow man!"

"So she did!" exclaimed Wattie, remem- bering the fact for the first time. "I did not notice it then."

"Why, you were blind! A more marked encouragement could not have been given to you. You men always seem to think a girl must throw herself into your arms be- fore you can believe in her sincerity. Now, don't be a fool, my dear friend; go down to Broadley next Sunday, and see if I am right or not about her affection for you."

Wattie Ellison promised somewhat shame- facedly that he would go down to Broadley, and Juliet shook hands with him and took her leave.

From the Temple Mrs. Travers drove to Mrs. Dalmaine's house, where Flora was waiting impatiently for her.

"Well, Flora, I have settled it all for you," said Juliet, as the two drove off together. "Captain Hartley has behaved very well, and acknowledged the wisdom of all I said to him. I have convinced him that an engagement with you would be the height of folly, as there would never be money enough for you to marry upon, and your father would never hear of it; so it's all at an end, and he has sent you a pretty message, and we are neither of us ever going to allude to the subject again; he is not at all angry with you, and thinks you are quite right—and I don't think he is very broken-hearted; so let us never speak of it again."

"O Juliet, how can I ever prove my gratitude to you?"

"Why, by doing exactly as I tell you. I am sorry to put an end to your visit, my dear, but I am going to send you home to-morrow."

"Not really?—O Juliet!"

"Yes, really, Flora. Believe me, after what has passed, it would be very awkward for you to meet Captain Hartley; besides, I have promised him that you shall go—it is only right and fair to him."

Flora shed a few tears behind her veil. "I have been very foolish and wrong, I know, Juliet dear," she said; "but losing the rest of the season seems a dreadful punishment."

"Well, take your punishment patiently," said Juliet, laughing, "and then perhaps it will turn out better than you expect; and be thankful, you foolish child, that you are not punished much more severely than by missing a few balls and fetes."

But of that other interview with Wattie Ellison at the Temple, and of his proposed visit to Broadley on the following Sunday, Juliet like a true tactician, said not a single word.

They were passing down Bond Street, and stopped for a moment at one of the large jewellers' shops.

"You needn't get out, Flora; I am only just going to ask if my bracelet is mended," said Juliet, as she got out of the carriage.

She went into the shop. A gentleman stood with his back to her, leaning over the counter. It was her husband.

A shopman was holding up before him a very handsome diamond locket, for which he was apparently bargaining, whilst several others of the same kind lay spread out in their velvet cases on the counter.

"I don't think I can do better than have that one," said Cis.

"Certainly, sir; it is quite the handsomest thing of the kind we have had for some time, and I am sure would give satisfaction. Where shall I send it for you, sir?"

"To Miss Rudenbach—120 Victoria Villas, Notting Hill," answered Cis, in a distinct voice, dictating the address to the man, who wrote it down.

"I will call again," said Juliet, turning to the door, to the man who had come forward to her. "I find I have forgotten something. I will call to-morrow."

And she got herself out of the shop and into her carriage with a sort of bruised giddy sensation one has after one has had a severe fall or a severe blow.

"Was the bracelet done?" said Flora.

"Why, how white you look, Juliet."

"Home!" said Juliet to the footman, who was waiting for orders, and spoke not another word all the rest of the drive.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A DIAMOND LOCKET AND A ROSEBUD.

GRETCHEN RUDENBACH sat in her pretty little drawing-room in Victoria Villas, with both elbows leaning on the table, her chin in her hands, and her eyes fixed on something in front of her. The something is a diamond-studded locket in a blue velvet case.

Don't be alarmed, gentle virtuous-souled reader—there is no disgraceful episode, no shameful meaning, attached to this sparkling jewelled ornament. It is simply and solely a wedding present.

When Gretchen Rudenbach had written to Cis Travers and asked him to come and see her, and had so prevented his accompanying his wife to her dinner at Hurlingham, it was that she really wished for his counsel and advice upon a very important subject.

The fact was, that she had lately fallen in again with her old admirer, David Anderson—no longer the shambling, awkward, wild, red-bearded David of the old singing-class days in Blandford Street, but a sleek, well-mannered, well-to-do-looking David, inclined to be portly, and wearing irreproachable clothes—who bore upon his outer man the impress of the success of his life, and who had the grave and serious aspect of a moneyed Scotch merchant.

Mr. David Anderson stood now in his dead father's shoes, and was head partner of the hide and tallow business in Glasgow; and the younger Anderson, from his early experience and training in a good London house of business, had made a much more profitable thing out of hide and tallow than ever his somewhat humdrum and old-fashioned father had done. Mr. David Anderson had his town house in Glasgow and his country house near Dunoon, on the banks of the Clyde, where his widowed mother kept house for him, and where he soon began to desire to install a wife.

Then he bethought himself of his first love, the blue-eyed maiden with the German name, who had so snubbed and despised him in the old days.

It was not likely, thought our friend, with the serene self-satisfaction of a self-made wealthy man, and with, it must be owned, some knowledge of the weaknesses of the fair sex—it was not likely that she would scorn and despise him now—now that he had so important a name in the hide and tallow business, and could offer her a rich and comfortable home, with any number of servants at her command, and handsome carriages to drive about in. A plain and ungainly wooer presents a very different appearance to the female mind when he is backed up by such arguments as these.

So David Anderson came up to London and hunted up his old love with some little difficulty and a praiseworthy perseverance, and made her, without more ado, a plain statement of his means, and an offer of his hand and fortune.

And then it was that Gretchen sent off for Cis Travers to ask his advice.

She could no more have helped turning to him in any crisis of her life than she could help, in spite of her judgment and reason, considering him the best and dearest of men.

There was about this little woman a humility of gratitude, a doglike fidelity, which nothing could ever alter or change in her. She considered that she owed every success of her life to his boyish kindness to her, and she could never forget it.

So she sent for him, to advise her whether she should marry David, or whether she should reject him. And Cis Travers gave her pretty nearly the same advice that he had given her five years ago, when he used to walk with her to her music lessons in Bloomsbury Square. He told her that David

was not half good enough for her, that he was rough and ungainly, that she would be throwing herself away upon him, and that she must not think of it.

Selfishly, as in the old days, though he could not marry her himself, he did not want any one else to have her.

Gretchen, resenting inwardly every word that he said, promised, nevertheless, to think it over for a day and a night before she decided. And when the day and night were over, she wrote to him and told him that, in spite of his advice, she had determined that she would marry David, that he had much improved in every way, and she felt sure that he would make her happy, and that she did not think it would be right to refuse so very good an offer. And by the same post she wrote to David, and in a few simple grateful words accepted him for her lover.

Cis Travers thereupon went out and bought her the diamond locket, and sent it to her with a letter so full of tragical reproaches and despairing reproofs to her for her cruelty to him, and broken-hearted prayers for her happiness, that even Gretchen could not help laughing at it as the most absurd and extravagant letter from a married man to a woman who was nothing but his friend and his confidante, that could possibly have been penned.

And the locket gave her no pleasure. It was too handsome a gift under the circumstances, and Gretchen felt sure that her future husband would not approve of it.

She was still sitting puzzling over it when David Anderson came in.

"Look here," she said to him; "Mr. Travers has just sent me this locket. I wish he had not—it is too handsome for me."

"I don't know about being too handsome, my dear," answered her lover, looking at her proudly. "I could, and mean to, give you plenty of diamonds far handsomer than that, and I am sure they will be none too good for you; but that is too handsome a present for Mr. Travers to give you—you are right there."

Gretchen had instinctively crushed up the offensively exaggerated letter in her hand and slipped it into her pocket as Mr. Anderson entered. No occasion to make him jealous on the second day of her engagement to him!

"Well," she said, standing up and shutting the case; "I don't like taking it, for I

feel sure his wife would not like his giving it to me;" and she blushed a little as she spoke.

"Very likely not, my dear. What do you mean to do about it?"

"Why, David, that is just what I was going to ask you—what would you advise me to do?" she asked, with a sweet deferential glance up at him.

"Send it back to him, my dear," answered honest David.

"That is just what I think I ought to do," she answered; "but how shall I do it? for he has been a very kind friend to me all my life, and I should be very sorry to offend him or hurt his feelings."

"Well, Gretchen, I should advise you to take it back yourself and give it to his wife; such a present should not go to any but a man's own wife—let her have it and do what she likes with it."

"You are quite right, David, and I will follow your advice," cried Gretchen, with alacrity. And she folded the case back in its papers, locked it up in her desk, and determined to carry it back to Grosvenor Street herself on the morrow.

It was Sunday afternoon, and Juliet was sitting alone; Mrs. Dalmaine had been luncheon with her, but had left. Flora had gone home two days ago, and Cis had gone out by himself. All at once the door opened, and Miss Rudenbach was announced.

With everything within her kindling into an angry indignation at the name, Juliet rose from her chair to receive her visitor with wellbred surprise at the visit in her face.

Gretchen came forward, blushing and trembling, holding a white parcel in her hand.

"You will wonder at my calling on you, Mrs. Travers," she said, nervously; "but I wanted to give you this—this parcel—it is a present which your husband—"

"Excuse me, Mademoiselle Rudenbach," interrupted Juliet, with haughty sternness; "if your business is with my husband, he is not at home; and surely whatever you may have to say to him cannot be fittingly said to his wife."

"But no—" answered Gretchen, looking up at her with a calm surprise in her blue eyes; "I do not want him; it is to you I wanted to speak. He is very kind—he has given me a present which is far too hand-

some, and which I cannot take—I do not want to offend him, so I have brought it back to you. See here for yourself how handsome it is—you will understand that I could not accept such a present."

She opened the case in her hand, and held out the flashing diamonds towards her.

Mrs. Travers pushed it away from her without a glance; for had she not seen that locket before!

"Presents from my husband to you," she said with an indignant flush, "are not things which you should dare to name to me. Keep your diamonds, Mademoiselle Rudenbach—I do not grudge them to you—but spare me at least the insult of your presence in my house."

And then all at once it flashed upon Gretchen what she meant, and what Cis Travers's wife took her for. With a cry of dismay she sprang towards her.

"Mrs. Travers! what can you mean? What is it possible that you can have thought of me? Your husband has been the kindest of my friends for years—this locket was his wedding present to me—I am going to be married to Mr. Anderson."

"Going to be married!" repeated Juliet, in astonishment.

"Yes. You have taken me for a dreadfully wicked woman. Is it possible that he has never told you of all his kindness to me, when, without his help, I should have starved?"

Juliet shook her head, feeling more and more bewildered. And then Gretchen sat down near her and told her the whole story of her life, and how Cis had helped her and been kind to her when she was alone, and ill, and penniless; and how he had been her friend ever since.

She confessed to his wife with timid blushes how at one time she had perhaps thought a little too much about Cis for her own happiness, and how she had gone down to Sothorne to see him married, and had prayed fervent prayers for the happiness of both husband and wife from her hidden corner in the little country church.

But long ago, she said—even on that very day—had such foolish thoughts been banished from her heart, and Cis had been only to her the dearest and truest friend that any lonely woman could wish for.

"I wish I had known all this long ago!" said Juliet, with a sigh. And then, with one of those generous impulses which were

natural to her honest character, she went up close to the little pianiste, and took hold of her hands and kissed her. "Will you forgive me," she said, "for having done you a grievous wrong in my heart? Yes, it is quite true that I had thought badly of you; but I can never do so again. If Cis had told me about you long ago, I should have been glad and proud to have been your friend; is it too late for me to become so now?"

"Dear Mrs. Travers!" murmured Gretchen, overcome by the sudden kindness of her words.

"Look here," continued Juliet, taking up the velvet case from where she had dropped it a few minutes ago scornfully on the table; "you will no longer refuse to accept this locket, will you, if I ask you to take it as a joint gift from myself as well as from Cecil, with all my most sincere good wishes for the happiness of your married life."

And so Cecil Travers opened the door and found the two women sitting hand in hand together on the sofa, with the glittering diamond locket between them. No wonder that he stood still and stared at so unexpected a sight.

"I am congratulating Mademoiselle Rudenbach on her engagement," said Juliet, looking at her husband not without a spice of malicious delight at his evident confusion. "She has been showing me the locket you have given her. I have asked her to let me share in the gift as well as in the good wishes."

And Cis could find no words wherein to answer her; he could only shake hands with Gretchen in silence, and look unutterably foolish and awkward.

After a few commonplace remarks relative to the weather, Gretchen wisely took her leave, and left the husband and wife together.

"Cis," said Juliet, standing up close to her husband when they were alone—"Cis, what a pity it is that you did not tell me what a great friend you were of Miss Rudenbach's long ago!"

"Why should I have told you?" he answered, looking both sheepish and surly, and turning half away from her.

"Because you might have known me well enough to have been sure that, had you only dealt openly with me, I should not have been jealous, or have made myself dis-

agreeable to you about her. I should have been very glad to have known her better, for I think she is a charming young woman. But, as it is, you have not dealt fairly by her, for your silence has made me do her and you a grievous injustice. Cis, I have suspected you wrongly, and I beg your pardon."

"I am glad you are sorry for it," he answered, surlily. Cis had no perception of the generous candor which had prompted her to the avowal of her mistake; he had no responding generosity to meet her halfway in her effort to make things straighter and better between them; he could only revile her with a sort of conceited assumption of superiority which she could not but resent.

"If I was suspicious, it was your own doing," she answered, with some show of temper. "Why did you never speak the truth to me? There was no harm in it. Why did you make a mystery of it, and tell me lies about it? Why, Cis," she added, passionately, "even if you had loved her, and had told me the truth, I could have forgiven you better!"

And then the small heart that there was in the man came up all on a sudden to the surface.

"If I loved her!" he said, with a sort of groan; and sank down into a chair, covering his face with his hands.

With a great pitying sympathy welling up in her own sinful sorrowing heart, Juliet laid her hand upon her husband's bent head, and kissed his fair ruffled locks very tenderly.

"My poor Cis!" she said, with a great gentleness, "we have made a dreadful mistake of our lives, haven't we? But somehow or other we have got to bear the consequences of our errors together; let us not make it harder to live out our lives together—for we have both of us much to bear with and to forgive in each other."

So they kissed one another in silence, and Cis, feeling a little humbled and subdued, went away and left her.

For the first time in his life, some dim perception of the superiority of his wife's character to his own came vaguely over him.

He saw that there had been no feminine spitefulness, no littleness of soul, in her tender tolerant words to him—she had not been shocked nor disgusted by his half-ad-

mission of his affection for Gretchen; no torrent of angry reproaches had poured from her lips. On the contrary, she had seemed at once to understand and to sympathize with him, and to pity his trouble as one who had no thought for herself, but only of him.

For the first time it struck him that possibly she too had suffered, and that her life, as she had said, had been a mistake as well as his own.

He remembered, like a voice out of another life, how, long ago, she had told him that she had no heart to give to him, and he wondered a little where and how that heart about which he had troubled himself so little had gone. He was, however, too selfish and indolent to disturb himself long about anything that did not concern his own personal comfort, and soon dismissed the subject from his thoughts.

But Juliet was the happier and the better for that little insight into her husband's heart, and for the forbearance and tenderness which it had called out in herself towards him. And so, although Hugh Fleming had already put the waters of the English Channel between himself and her, and she was to see him no more, a little of the blackness and darkness of the heavy clouds that encompassed her had even now been cleared away out of her daily life.

Meanwhile, on that same summer Sunday afternoon, another and very different scene was being acted out under the walnut tree on the lawn at Broadley House.

An idyl ever graceful and ever new—"the old, old story" that never loses its charm nor its sweetness, however many times in the world's history it is repeated—was being told over again under the fluttering branches of the tree which Flora had once in idle fancy likened to a cathedral isle, and which became in very truth a shrine to her on this day.

The sunshine glinted down through the aromatic-scented walnut leaves upon her drooping yellow head and sweet downcast face, and fluttered about the soft draperies of her simple dress, as Wattie Ellison told her, in strong manly words, the story of his deep love.

Divested of her fashionable London garments, of her crowd of admirers, of all the coquetry and unreality of her first season's experiences, Flora Travers seemed to have been transformed once again into the sim-

ple country maiden whom he had always known and loved; nor had her six weeks of town life been altogether an unmixed evil to her, in that they had taught her to understand her own heart, and to value the sterling affection of the man who, not being blind to her faults, loved her in spite of them, more than all the flattery and adulation that had lately turned her head, but had not been able to spoil her heart.

And presently Wattie took the hand which she had promised him upon his arm, and under the shady lime tree avenue and out through the yellow cornfields, where the harvest was already beginning, they strolled slowly down to the churchyard in the valley, where scarlet geraniums, and mignonne, and great clusters of white clove carnations had turned poor Georgie's grave into a very wilderness of loveliness; and there, standing up together hand in hand by the white cross round which a crimson rose had been twined by loving hands, Wattie Ellison told over again to her sister the short sad story of his first love.

"I am sure that she sees us this day, Flora, and that her blessing is upon us both," said Wattie, with his simple child-like faith; and then he stooped down, and Flora's first present from her future husband was a rosebud off her sister's grave.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE END OF IT.

THE scene shifts, and we are at Sotherne again: Sotherne without its roses and with its great woods all stripped and bare, and with the winds and rains of December moaning dismally among its quaint twisted chimneys.

Yet, spite of the dreary autumn weather, Sotherne looks less dismal than it has done for many a day. There are fires in every room, and every window in the long gabled facade is unshuttered, and there are footsteps and voices along its passages from morning till night, for Sotherne's mistress has come back to live in it again.

The house in Grosvenor Street is let, and Mrs. Travers has allowed it to be understood that the home of her fathers is, for the future, to be her headquarters: at which the neighborhood generally rejoiced greatly.

A place like Sotherne is a dead loss to a county when it is shut up and uninhabited; and even in Mrs. Blair's long and tranquil

reign it was a useless house, as far as sociability is concerned.

But now that Mr. and Mrs. Travers have come to settle down there for the best part of the year, the whole population seems to have brightened and furbished itself up, in its delight to welcome them back. There have been more dinner-parties and dances given this autumn than have been remembered for many years; and great was the joy and excitement when it became known that, as soon as Christmas should be over, two entertainments on a large scale would be held within Sotherne's ancient walls—the first a juvenile dance and Christmas-tree, and the second a full-blown ball to which "everybody" was to be asked.

Cecil had consented to leave London and to return to Sotherne more willingly than Juliet had thought it possible. For the first few weeks he amused himself at playing the country squire on his wife's property, but after a while he got tired of wandering about the fields with the headkeeper or the bailiff, and making ignorant remarks and suggestions, to which these gentlemen listened in silence, with a respectful smile, but which they did not dream of acting upon. As he had no country tastes or pursuits, he soon found the time hang heavily on his hands, and sat all day long in the library reading French novels or dozing idly in his chair.

"Would you like to go up to town again, Cis?" said his wife to him more than once; "I am sorry now we came to Sotherne—you seem to find it so wearisome; would you like to go back?"

"No; of what use would that be?" he would answer, fretfully. "I am not feeling well—I had just as soon be quiet."

And something in his peevish answers and pale pinched face made Juliet a little uneasy on his account. There was surely something more than his usual fretfulness and listlessness upon him. Every other day he would go over to Broadley and sit with his father for an hour or so, and often, as she saw them together, Juliet thought that the old squire—who still rode to hounds in a quiet way and tramped about his fields with his gun on his shoulder and his setter behind him to pick up a brace of pheasants or a couple of rabbits, and who still took a lively interest in his "Field" and his "Sporting Gazette"—was by far the younger man of the two.

Once a week, indeed, Cecil seemed to brighten up a little at the arrival of a weekly letter, which, at Juliet's special request, Mrs. David Anderson never forgot to write to him; and the only thing to which he seemed to look forward with any degree of pleasure or animation, was the prospect of a visit from Gretchen and her husband, which they had promised to pay when the winter should be over. Something more than the despondency of a weak character was in the perpetual fretfulness and depression of spirits to which Cecil Travers had now become habitually subject. Sometimes Juliet thought his health must be breaking up altogether, and sometimes she even feared for his mind. Several times she entreated him to see a doctor; but Cis only shook her off impatiently, and refused to listen to her advice.

Juliet was sitting one afternoon in the little morning-room where so many of the scenes of her early life had been acted out. A foreign letter lay on the writing-table in front of her—a letter dated from the shores of the Lake of Como—sweet-scented with the pale double violets which had been enclosed in it, and breathing the fragrance of a thoroughly happy heart in every line.

Never, wrote Flora, were two people more suited to each other than she and her dear Wattie—their days were one succession of unbroken happiness—long days of sunshine and of peace, of wanderings side by side under the chestnut trees, or of lazy dreamy hours on the bosom of the blue lake. They were in no hurry to come home; a very fairy-land indeed had the purple mountains and the calm waters of Northern Italy become to them.

Juliet put down the letter with a happy smile. She had done some good there, she felt, and longed a little selfishly for the honeymoon days to be over, and for Wattie and his pretty bride to be at home again and within her reach, where the sight of their happiness might be a perpetual pleasure and interest to her.

Another letter lay beside her, from her stepmother—a letter written in a very different spirit.

Since Juliet had returned to live at Sotherne, she had taken herself, by so doing, completely out of the reach of Mrs. Lamp-lough's slanderous tongue. Living a quiet life alone with Cis at Sotherne, and Colonel Fleming gone back again to India, it would

have been difficult for any female friend, however spitefully inclined, to have spoken harmful words of her. Mrs. Lamplough deemed it wise to ignore all disagreeable and dangerous allusions, and to keep up a brisk correspondence, teeming with flattering words and exaggerated expressions of affection to her "dearest Juliet."

In truth, the poor woman could not afford to lose Juliet's friendship, for she was very far from contented with her lot.

Marriage with the Rev. Daniel Lamplough whom she soon discovered to be a selfish and vulgar domestic tyrant, was anything but the bliss she had at one time expected it to be. Instead of being allowed to have her own way, to give entertainments, to dress fashionably, and to mix in "aristocratic circles," as had once been her dream, Mrs. Lamplough found herself a slave, bound hand and foot under a threefold tyranny. Her husband, her sister-in-law, and her sour-visaged maid, seemed to vie with each other to thwart her in every trifle, and to make her life a perfect misery. She hardly knew which of these three personages she hated the most. She could not do the smallest thing, from altering the position of an armchair, to dismissing a housemaid, or inviting a friend to dinner, without obtaining permission from one or other, and often from all, of these three potentates: and her worldliness, and sinfulness, and general similitude to the children of the devil was so often cast in her teeth, and bemoaned over by her persecutors, that she began to detest the very name of religion, and once had the boldness to tell her husband that if the children of righteousness were all like him, she should infinitely prefer to belong to the family of sin—a glaring piece of blasphemy, for which she was practically sent to Coventry for more than a week, as her husband refused to speak to her, dined from Monday till Saturday at his club, because he said that he could not sit at meat with so hardened a sinner, groaned aloud when he met her about the house, and, what was the worst penance of all, prayed specially at morning and evening family prayers, before all the servants, that the Almighty might be pleased to turn the heart of his dear but sinful and erring wife. A few months of such treatment were sufficient completely to alter and to subdue the unhappy woman; her only pleasure now was in writing long miserable letters to Juliet, in which she poured out full de-

scriptions of her woes and troubles, and bitter repentance for having ever married again, and often deep sorrow for all her past offences and wrong dealings towards her stepdaughter. Her letters were a very jeremiad of misery; and Juliet, who was generous, although to the last she could never quite believe in anything she said, forgave her freely, and kept up the correspondence. She wrote to her this afternoon a long cheerful comforting letter, in which she tried to raise her spirits and make her look more hopefully at all the troubles and worries of her self-chosen life.

And then, as the short winter afternoon began to draw in, and it became almost too dark to see to write, she left the writing-table and went to sit down on a low seat in the window.

Outside, the wind howled and moaned dimly among the naked branches of the trees, the sky was heavy and lowering, the dead leaves fluttered across the lawn in a melancholy way.

It grew darker and darker—one by one the more distant objects in the landscape faded away indistinctly into the grayness of the coming night, till at last only the twisted rosebushes in the bed just outside the windows gleamed out of the dark background, lit up from the firelight within the room.

Back upon Juliet's memory came the vivid picture of just such another evening long ago, when the winter winds had so howled and moaned, and the dreary darkness had come on and left her sitting there staring out into it with hopeless tearful eyes. She remembered how, on that other winter evening, there had come the sudden rush of a horse up the avenue and the clanging peal of the bell at the hall-door; and then all had been hurry, and confusion, and dismay, till poor Georgie had been brought into her house to die. Very vividly that deathbed came back to Juliet's mind to-day—the long sad night-watch, the broken-hearted grief of the old squire, the painful bustle of the arrival of Wattie and Cecil from town, and then the last scene of all, and the dying girl's last words, when she had extracted that fatal mistaken promise from herself, and clasped her hand into that of Cecil.

As Juliet thought it all over, slow sad tears of sorrow for her dear friend, and of regret for her own wasted life, coursed one by one down upon her clasped hands.

With a shudder as of some premonition of evil, she knew not what, she rose from

the window as old Higgs suddenly opened the door and stood before her.

"What is it, Higgs?" she asked, just in the very words in which she had asked it on that evening long ago.

"Would you come into the library, ma'am?" said the old butler, with rather a frightened face. "I don't think that master can be well, for he never moved when I took the lamp in, nor answered me when I asked if he had any letters for the post."

"He was asleep," answered Juliet, with a strange flutter of terror at her heart as she hastened from the room.

They went into the library together—Juliet first, with her quick impetuous step, and Higgs following her, trembling all over from head to foot.

Cecil sat upright in his armchair, with his back towards the door. A shaded reading-lamp stood on the table in front of him, and flung a bright circle of light just round it, and ghostly shadows about the large room and over its oaken furniture and heavy bookcases. His elbows were on the table in front of him, and his hands both put up shading his face, and before him lay an open writing-case and a half-finished letter upon it. When they came in he never turned in his chair, nor lifted his head, nor dropped his hands, nor moved one single hair's breadth in his attitude.

"Cis, look up! speak to me!" cried Juliet, with a sharp ringing voice of horror, as she sprang towards him and touched his shoulder. And then she caught away his hands, and they were cold and stiff; she saw that his face was white and altered, and his eyes wide open and fixed—for in them was the solemn immovable stare of death.

For Cecil Travers would never move or look up, nor evermore speak to her again!

* * * * *

Six months have come and gone, and summer is in the land again. It is six months since Cecil Travers was laid beside his sister in Sotherne churchyard—six months, during which the crops have been sown and sprung up, and well-nigh ripened, and the trees have budded and unfolded themselves into midsummer glory, and myriads of summer birds and insects have been ushered into life and happiness, and whole showers of roses have covered Sotherne's walls with a mantle of beauty.

In these six months Juliet Travers has recovered from the severe illness which the terrible shock of her husband's sudden

death had brought upon her; and now reclines very pale and thin in her deep crape and snowy widow's cap, on a low couch that has been wheeled out on to the lawn for her, under the elm trees.

Juliet has mourned for Cecil truly and deeply—not with the mourning of a widow who has lost her supporter and her other self, but rather with the gentle grief of a mother over some sickly wayward child, who has been to her more an occupation and a duty than a comfort or a pleasure.

But to all such mourning, when it does not wrench up the very roots and vitals of our hearts, when it does not alter our nature, nor throw an impenetrable gloom over our whole lives—to all such mourning, when it is sad but not bitter, there comes a natural end. And to Juliet's mourning that end had come; her illness—many days of unconscious delirium, many weeks of utter prostration and weakness too great for thinking—had placed a wide gulf, a blank of vacancy, between herself and the past. A new life is now opening before her, and, with her sense of freedom in the realization of her widowhood, new hopes and new thoughts are beginning to stir within her.

She had called for her writing materials to be brought out to her on the low table beside her sofa, and is sitting now with a blank sheet of paper before her, her pen idle in her hand, and her eyes fixed with a not unhappy look in them upon the distant blue hills beyond the valley.

"Shall I? dare I?" she is saying over again to herself, whilst a little smile plays about her lips.

Then all on a sudden she pushes aside her writing materials, and rising, with a somewhat weak and trembling step, walks across the lawn into the house through the morning-room window.

And what do you suppose she does there, daughter of Eve as she is?

Why, first she carefully shuts the door, and then she moves away a sofa from before a long mirror that fills up one end of the room, and, with a blush that would not misbecome a maiden of nineteen, she takes off her widow's cap, and surveys her own fair image in the glass.

And fair it is, despite her eight-and-twenty years, and despite the saddened lines which suffering and sorrow have traced upon her face.

Her small dark head, with its crown of polished plaits, is upheld as proudly as of

old; her glorious eyes are as deep and as tender — ay, and as full of fire; the rich curve of her lips, the regular outline of her oval face, and her figure—which, if it is a shade more matronly, is as perfect in its graceful curves — and as full of subtle charm, as when she first greeted Hugh Fleming standing out upon the doorstep of her home, and he had thought her the loveliest and fairest among English maidens.

Yes; she could acknowledge to herself without vanity that her beauty had not yet left her, that she was still lovely with a loveliness which, had it ever power to charm and to fascinate him, must do so still.

Then she pinned on the disfiguring cap, and went out and sat down again before her writing-case and began to write rapidly and hastily, with a glad rosy flush coming and going upon her downbent face.

“Why should we waste any more of our lives apart from each other? We have suffered too much and too long to care any longer for the empty conventionalities and the idle gossip of strangers who do not know what our life’s story has been. I am prepared very gladly to be called heartless and disrespectful to poor Cecil’s memory, and to be a nine days’ wonder and scandal to my native county, if only by so doing I may but have you with me again. Dear Hugh! come back to me, for truly I have hungered and thirsted for the sight of you, for too many weary days, to bear absence from you with anything like patience, now that nothing more need stand between us forever. Our lives have been half wasted apart; let us not lose any more of the precious golden days which might be spent together. Darling, come back to me; do not give me the bitter humiliation of being rejected by you for the third time!”

Nor does he.

Within a few months of the receipt of that letter, Hugh Fleming is in England again; and when a year is over since Cecil has been carried to his grave, he goes down to Sotherne one morning by the early train, and Juliet, and Mrs. Dawson, and Wattie, and Flora meet him in Sotherne church, just in their everyday clothes, only that Juliet has doffed her crape and wears a simple gray dress, plain as any nun’s; the old vicar stands in the chancel with his spectacles on his nose and his open prayer-book in his hand, and a few villagers drop in to look and to wonder; and in this fash-

ion these two, who have loved and suffered so long, are married at last to each other.

Of course, as she had prophesied, it was a nine days’ scandal to the neighborhood, who knew nothing of her life; but to Cecil’s family she had told her story, and they forgave her, and were not offended with her for marrying the man she had loved for so long—and that was enough for Juliet.

Another distress to the county was that Colonel and Mrs. Fleming did not go away for a wedding tour, like all other decent and respectable brides and bridegrooms, but that, shaking hands with the little wedding party at the church door, they walked off together arm-in-arm up the hill to the house, where they immediately took up their abode without any sort of outward rejoicing, and with no thought of going away even for a week.

One more glimpse of my heroine before we say good-by to her. She is standing on the lawn with her husband a few days after her marriage, and together they are watching a glowing golden winter sunset shedding its glory over the landscape below.

It is just such another evening as the one with which my story opened, only that, in place of the golden-heated glow of October, it is now the paler but scarcely less lovely light of the finest and warmest of February days. Crocuses and snowdrops are springing up in the garden-beds around them, and blackbirds and thrushes are awaking after their long winter silence to welcome the coming spring with a very concert of joy.

A new life dawns upon the earth. A new life, too, is opening for the husband and wife. Juliet, with a deep thankfulness in her sobered face, is looking out with solemnly glad eyes over the familiar scene, and Hugh is looking at her face.

“Darling,” he says, drawing her to him with a sudden flash of tenderness, “it is good to be together at last, is it not? We have suffered so much in the past—”

“Ah, it is more than I deserve!” she interrupts, quickly, resting a soft rosy cheek against his own. “When I think of all the wicked things I once said and thought, can I ever repent enough! We have suffered, Hugh—but I have also sinned!”

“Sweet sinner!” he answers, playfully, and lays his lips upon hers. “Where is the man living who would not forgive to so fair a penitent the sin that was sinned for love’s sake!”